



# MILTON

BY

SIR WALTER RALEIGH

Author of  
'Style,' 'Wordsworth,' &c.



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*ELEVENTH IMPRESSION*





TO

R. A. M. STEVENSON

WHOSE RADIANT AND SOARING INTELLIGENCE  
ENLIGHTENED AND GUIDED ME  
DURING THE YEARS OF OUR LOST COMPANIONSHIP  
THIS UNAVAILING TRIBUTE OF  
MEMORY AND LOVE



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## INTRODUCTION

FRANCIS BACON, in one of his prose fragments, draws a memorable distinction between "arts mechanical" and "sciences of conceit." "In arts mechanical," he says, "the first device comes shortest, and time addeth and perfecteth. But in sciences of conceit the first author goeth farthest, and time leeseth and corrupteth. . . . In the former, many wits and industries contributed in one. In the latter, many men's wits spent to deprave the wit of one."

I fear that literary criticism of the kind that I propose to myself in these chapters on Milton must be classified with the "sciences of conceit." Indeed, Bacon puts it out of question that he himself would so have regarded it, for he goes on to explain how, after the deliverances of a master, "then begin men to aspire to the second prizes, to be a profound interpreter and commentor, to be a sharp champion and defender, to be a methodical compounder and abridger. And this is the

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unfortunate succession of wits which the world hath yet had, whereby the patrimony of all knowledge goeth not on husbanded and improved, but wasted and decayed."

The blow is aimed at the scholastic philosophers, but it falls heavy on the critics of literature, on all who "aspire to the second prizes," or who think "that a borrowed light can increase the original light from whom it is taken." It is a searching arraignment of all who set themselves to expound in words the meaning and purpose of a master of verbal expression. Yet the very breadth of the indictment brings comfort and a means of escape. For the chief difficulties of an attempt to understand and judge Milton are difficulties inherent in the nature, not only of all criticism in the large sense, but also of all reading. In this association with great spirits which we call reading we receive but what we give, and take away only what we are fit to carry. Milton himself has stated the doctrine in its most absolute form, and has sought an enhanced authority for it by attributing it to the Christ—

Who reads

Incessantly, and to his reading brings not  
A spirit and judgment equal or superior  
(And what he brings what needs he elsewhere seek ?)  
Uncertain and unsettled still remains,  
Deep versed in books and shallow in himself,  
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys

*And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge,  
As children gathering pebbles on the shore.*

Literally taken, this is the negation of all the higher functions of criticism, and the paralysis of all learning. Only his peers, it is argued, can read Shakespeare intelligently; and, as if that did not give him few enough readers, they are further told that they will be wasting their time! But love, unlike this proud Stoicism, is humble, and contented with a little. I would put my apology in the language of love rather than of philosophy. I know that in Shakespeare, or in Milton, or in any rare nature, as in *Faire Virtue*, the mistress of *Philarete*—

*There is some conceald thing  
So each great limiting,  
He can see no more of merit  
Than becoms his worth and spirit.*

The appreciation of a great author asks knowledge and industry before it may be attempted, but in the end it is the critic, not the author, who is judged by it, and, where his sympathies have been too narrow, or his sight too dim, condemned without reprieve, and buried without a tombstone.

Imperfect sympathy, that eternal vice of criticism, is sometimes irremediable, sometimes caused by imperfect knowledge. It takes forms as various as the authors whom it misjudges. In the case of Shakespeare, when we attempt to estimate him, to

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auge him, to see him from all sides, we become almost painfully conscious of his immensity. We can build no watch-tower high enough to give us a bird's-eye view of that "globe of miraculous continents." We are out of breath when we attempt to accompany him on his excursions, where he,

through strait, rough, dense, or rare,  
With head, hands, wings, or feet pursues his way,  
And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.

He moves so easily and so familiarly among human passions and human emotions, is so completely at home in all societies and all companies, that he makes us feel hide-bound, prejudiced and ill-bred, by the side of him. We have to widen our conception of human nature in order to think of him as a man. How hard a thing it is to conceive of Shakespeare as of a human spirit, embodied and conditioned, whose affections, though higher mounted than ours, yet, when they stooped, stooped with the like wing, is witnessed by all biographies of Shakespeare, and by many thousands of the volumes of criticism and commentary that have been written on his works. One writer is content to botanise with him—to study plant-lore, that is with a theatrical manager, in his hard-earned leisure for teacher. Another must needs read the Bible with him, although, when all is said, Shakespeare's study was but little on the Bible. Others elect

keep him to music, astronomy, law, hunting, hawking, fishing. He is a good companion out of doors, and some would fain keep him there, to make a country gentleman of him. His incorrigible pre-occupation with humanity, the ruling passion and employment of his life, is beyond the range of their complete sympathy; they like to catch him out of hours, to draw him aside and bespeak his interest, for a few careless minutes, in the trades and pastimes that bulk so largely and so seriously in their own perspective of life. They hardly know what to make of his "unvalued book"; but they know that he was a great man, and to have bought a wool-fell or a quarter of mutton from him, that would have been something! Only the poet-critics attempt to see life, however brokenly, through Shakespeare's eyes, to let their enjoyment keep attendance upon his. And from their grasp, too, he escapes by sheer excess.

In the case of Milton the imperfection of our sympathy is due to other causes. In the first place, we know him as we do not know Shakespeare. The history of his life can be, and has been, minutely written. The affairs of his time, political and religious, have been recorded with enormous wealth of detail; and this wealth, falling into fit hands, has given us those learned modern historians to whom the seventeenth century means a period of five thousand two hundred and

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teen weeks. Milton's own attitude towards these affairs is in no way obscure; he has explained it with great fulness and candour in numerous publications, so that it would be easy to draw up a declaration of his chief tenets in politics and religion. The slanders of his adversaries he met again and again with lofty passages of self-revelation. "With me it fares now," he remarks in one of these, "as with him whose outward garment hath been injured and ill-bedighted; for having no other shift, what help but to turn the inside outwards, especially if the lining be of the same, or, as it is sometimes, much better." In his poetry, too, he delights to reveal himself, to take the knowing reader into his confidence, to honour the fit audience with a confession.

But the difficulty is there none the less. Few critics have found Milton too wide or too large for them; many have found him too narrow, which is another form of imperfect sympathy. His lack of humour has alienated the interest of thousands. His ardent advocacy of toleration in the noblest of his prose treatises has been belittled by a generation which prides itself on that flaccid form of benevolence, and finds the mere repeal of the Licensing Act the smallest part of it. His pamphlets on divorce and on government have earned him the reputation of a theorist and

dreamer. The shrewd practical man finds it easy to despise him. The genial tolerant man, whose geniality of demeanour towards others is a kind of quit-rent paid for his own moral laxity, regards him as a Pharisee. The ready humourist devises a pleasant and cheap entertainment by dressing Adam and Eve in modern garments and discussing their relations in the jargon of modish frivolity. Even the personal history of the poet has been made to contribute to the gaiety of nations, and the flight of Mary Powell, the first Mrs. Milton, from the house in Aldersgate Street, has become something of a stock comic episode in the history of English literature. So heavy is the tax paid, even by a poet, for deficiency in breadth and humour. Almost all men are less humorous than Shakespeare; but most men are more humorous than Milton, and these, it is to be feared, having suffered themselves to be dragooned by the critics into professing a distant admiration for *Paradise Lost*, have paid their last and utmost tribute to the genius of its author.

It may be admitted without hesitation that his lonely greatness rather forces admiration on us than attracts us. That unrelenting intensity; that lucidity, as clear as air and as hard as agate; that passion which burns with a consuming heat or with a blinding light in all his writings, have endeared him to none. It is impossible to take

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's ease with Milton, to induce him to forget principles for a moment in the name of social pleasure. The most genial of his personal sonnets addressed to Henry Lawrence, the son of the president of Cromwell's Council, and is an invitation to dinner. The repast promised is "light and choice"; the guest is apostrophised, somewhat formidably, as "Lawrence, of virtuous father, virtuous son," and is reminded, before he has dined, that

He who of these delights can judge, and spare  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

But the qualities that make Milton a poor boon-companion are precisely those which combine to raise his style to an unexampled loftiness, a dignity that bears itself easily in society greater than human. To attain to this height it was needful that there should be no aimless expatiation of the intellect, no facile diffusion of the sympathies over the wide field of human activity and human character. All the strength of mind and heart and will that was in Milton went into the process of raising himself. He is like some giant palm-tree; the foliage that sprang from it as it grew has long since withered, the stem rises gaunt and bare; but high up above, outlined against the sky, is a crown of perennial verdure. It is essential for the understanding of Milton

that we should take account of the rare simplicity of his character. No subtleties ; no tricks of the dramatic intellect, which dresses itself in a hundred masquerading costumes and peeps out of a thousand spy-holes ; no development, one might almost say, only training, and that self-imposed. There is but one Milton, and he is throughout one and the same, in his life, in his prose, and in his verse ; from those early days, when we find him, an uncouth swain,

With eager thought warbling his Doric lay,

to the last days when, amid a swarm of disasters, he approved himself like Samson, and earned for himself the loftiest epitaph in the language, his own—

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast ; no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise, or blame ; nothing but well and fair,  
And what may quiet us in a death so noble.

The world has not wholly misunderstood or failed to appreciate this extraordinary character, as one curious piece of evidence will serve to show. Milton is one of the most egotistic of poets. He makes no secret of the high value he sets upon his gifts—"gifts of God's imparting," as he calls them, "which I boast not, but thankfully acknowledge, and fear also lest at my certain account they be reckoned to me many

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He who of these delights can judge, and spare  
To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

But the qualities that make Milton a poor boon-companion are precisely those which combine to raise his style to an unexampled loftiness, a dignity that bears itself easily in society greater than human. To attain to this height it was needful that there should be no aimless expatiation of the intellect, no facile diffusion of the sympathies over the wide field of human activity and human character. All the strength of mind and heart and will that was in Milton went into the process of raising himself. He is like some giant palm-tree; the foliage that sprang from it as it grew has long since withered, the stem rises gaunt and bare; but high up above, outlined against the sky, is a crown of perennial verdure.

It is essential for the understanding of Milton

that we should take account of the rare simplicity of his character. No subtleties ; no tricks of the dramatic intellect, which dresses itself in a hundred masquerading costumes and peeps out of a thousand spy-holes ; no development, one might almost say, only training, and that self-imposed. There is but one Milton, and he is throughout one and the same, in his life, in his prose, and in his verse ; from those early days, when we find him, an uncouth swain,

With eager thought warbling his Doric lay,

to the last days when, amid a swarm of disasters, he approved himself like Samson, and earned for himself the loftiest epitaph in the language, his own—

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail  
Or knock the breast ; no weakness, no contempt,  
Dispraise, or blame ; nothing but well and fair,  
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rather than few." Before he has so much as begun his great poem he covenants with his reader "that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine ; . . . nor to be obtained by the invocation of dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his seraphim, with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases ; to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs ; till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost, I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them." And when he came to redeem his pledge, in the very opening lines of his epic, trusting to the same inspiration he challenges the supremacy of the ancients by his

adventurous song

That with no middle flight intends to soar  
Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues  
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

"This man cuts us all out, and the Ancier too," Dryden is reported to have said. But t

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## CHAPTER I

### JOHN MILTON

JOHN MILTON, the son of a middle-aged scrivener, was born on Friday, December the 9th, 1608, at his father's house in Bread Street, Cheapside; and died on Sunday, November the 8th, 1674, in a small house, with but one room on a floor, in Artillery Walk, Bunhill Fields, London. Of his father the records that remain show him to have been a convinced member of the Puritan party in the Church, a man of liberal culture and intelligence, a lover of music (which taste Milton inherited), a wise and generous friend to the son who became a poet. We owe it to his wisdom rather than to his prosperity that Milton was allowed to live at home without any ostensible profession until he was thirty years of age and more.

For the first sixteen years of his life Milton was educated partly at home, by a Presbyterian tutor called Thomas Young, partly at St. Paul's

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School, which he attended for some years as a day-scholar. From his twelfth year onward he was an omnivorous reader, and before he left school had written some boyish verses, void of merit. The next fourteen years of his life, after leaving school, were spent at Cambridge, in Buckinghamshire, and in foreign travel, so that he was thirty years old before he lived continuously in London again.

We know pretty well how he spent his time at Cambridge and at Horton, sedulously turning over the Greek and Latin classics, dreaming of immortality. We know less about his early years in London, where there were wider and better opportunities of gaining an insight into "all seemly and generous arts and affairs." London was a great centre of traffic, a motley crowd of adventurers and traders even in those days, and the boy Milton must often have wandered down to the river below London Bridge to see the ships come in. His poems are singularly full of figures drawn from ships and shipping, some of them bookish in their origin, others which may have been suggested by the sight of ships. Now it is Satan, who, after his fateful journey through chaos, nears the world,

And like a weather-bossen vessel holds

Gladly the port, though shrouds and tackle crows

Now it is Dalila, whom the Chorus behold approaching

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# MILTON

4  
Like a stately ship  
Of Tarsus, bound for the isles  
Of Javan or Gadire,  
With all her bravery on, and tackle trim,  
Sails filled, and streamers waving,  
Courtied by all the winds that hold them play.

Or, again, it is Samson reproaching himself,  
Who, like a foolish pilot, have shipwrecked  
My vessel trusted to me from above,  
Gloriously rigged.

The bulk of Satan is compared to the great sea-beast Leviathan, beheld off the coast of Norway by

The pilot of some small night-founder'd skiff.  
In his approach to the happy garden the Adversary  
is likened to

them who sail  
Beyond the Cape of Hope, and now are past  
Mozambic, off at sea north-east winds blow  
Sabaeon odours from the spicy shore  
Of Araby the Blest, with such delay  
Well pleased they slack their course, and many a league  
Cheered with the grateful smell old Ocean smiles;  
So entertained those odorous sweets the Fiend.

And when he draws near to Eve in the rose  
thicket,

sidelong he works his way,  
As when a ship, by skilful steersman wrought,  
Nigh river's mouth, or foreland, where the wind  
Veers oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her sail.

There is nothing here that is not within the reach of any inland reader, but Milton's choice of poetical similitudes may serve to remind us how much of the interest of Old London centred round its port. Here were to be heard those tales of far-sought adventure and peril which gave even to the boisterous life of Elizabethan London an air of triviality and security. Hereby came in "the variety of fashions and foreign stuffs," which Fynes Moryson, writing in Milton's childhood, compares to the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea for number. All sorts of characters, nationalities, and costumes were daily to be seen in Paul's Walk, adjoining Milton's school. One sort interests us pre-eminently. "In the general pride of England," says Fynes Moryson, "there is no fit difference made of degrees; for very Bankrupts, Players, and Cutpurses go apparelled like gentlemen." Shakespeare was alive during the first seven years of Milton's life, and was no doubt sometimes a visitor to the Mermaid, a stone's throw from the scrivener's house. Perhaps his cloak brushed the child Milton in the street. Milton was born in the golden age of the drama, and a score of masterpieces were put upon the London stage while he was in his cradle. But the golden age passed rapidly; the quality of the drama degenerated and the opposition to it grew strong before he was of years to attend a play. Perhaps he



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were either excursions of the imagination or belong to his later occasional sojourns in London. In his *Eikonoklastes* he quotes certain lines from *Richard III.*, and here and there in his prose, as well as in his verse, there are possibly some faint reminiscences of Shakespearian phrases. So, for instance, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, he seems to echo a famous speech of Macbeth, while he claims that his remedy of free divorce "hath the virtue to soften and dispel rooted and knotty sorrows, and without enchantment." But these are doubtless the memories of reading. In the *Apology for Smectymnuus*, when he has to reply to the charge that he "haunted playhouses" during his college days, he retorts the charge, it is true, rather than denies it. Yet the retort bespeaks a certain severity and preciseness in judging of plays and their actors, which can hardly have found gratification in the licenses and exuberances of the contemporary drama. It was not difficult, he remarks, to see plays, "when in the Colleges so many of the young divines, and those in next aptitude to divinity, have been seen so often upon the stage

writhing and unboning their clergy limbs to all the antic and dishonest gestures of Trinculoes, buffoons, and bawds." "If it be unlawful," he continues, "to sit and behold a mercenary comedian personating that which is least unseemly for a hireling to do, how much more blameful is it to endure the sight of as vile things acted by persons either entered, or presently to enter into the ministry; and how much more foul and ignominious for them to be the actors!"

It was, at least, a happy chance that the first of Milton's verses to appear in print should have been *An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatick Poet, W. Shakespeare*, contributed to the Second Folio in 1632. The main interests of the household at the Spread Eagle in Bread Street must have been far enough remote from the doings of the companies of players. John Milton the elder would probably have agreed with Sir Thomas Bodley, who called plays "riffe-raffes," and declared that they should never come into his library. The Hampton Court Conference, the Synod of Dort, the ever-widening divisions in the Church, between Arminian and Calvinist, between Prelatist and Puritan, were probably subjects of a nearer interest, even to the poet in his youth, than the production of new or old plays upon the stage. Milton's childhood was spent in the very twilight of the Elizabethan age; it was greatly fortunate

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for him, and for us, that he caught the after-glow of the sunset upon his face. He read Spenser while Spenser was still the dominant influence in English poetry. "He hath confessed to me," said Dryden, "that Spenser was his original,"—an incredible statement unless we understand "original" in the sense of his earliest admiration. He read Shakespeare and Jonson in the first editions. He read Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas*, *His Divine Weekes and Workes*; and perhaps thence conceived the first vague idea of a poem on a kindred subject. It is necessary to insist on his English masters, because, although the greater part of his time and study was devoted to the classics, the instrument that he was to use was learned in a native school. His metre, his magnificent vocabulary, his unerring phraseology, too learning and practice. He attached a high value to his study of English poetry. When he spoke of "our sage and serious Spenser (whom I dare Aquinas)," he was conscious that he was maintaining what seemed a bold paradox in an age when scholasticism still controlled education. It is pleasant to think of Milton during these years, whether in London or at Christ's College, in his "calm and pleasing solitariness, fed cheerful and confident thoughts," before even

and a hint that he must perforce "embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, put on beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies." From the first, we may be sure, he read the poets as one poet reads another, and apprenticed himself to them for their craft. He was never drawn out of the highroad of art by the minuter and more entangling allurements of scholarship. In one of his Divorce pamphlets he tells, with the inevitable touch of pride, how he never could delight in long citations, much less in whole translations, "whether it be natural disposition or education in me, or that my mother bore me a speaker of what God made mine own, and not a translator."

Milton was intended by his family, and by his own early resolves, for the service of the Church. The growing unrest, therefore, in matters ecclesiastical during the early part of the seventeenth century could not but affect him. The various parties and tendencies in the Church of England had never, since the Reformation, attained to a condition of stable equilibrium. But the settlement under Elizabeth was strengthened, and the parties bound together for thirty years, by the ever-present fear of Rome. When that fear was allayed, and the menace that hung over the very existence of the nation removed by the defeat of the Armada, the differences within the Church broke out afresh, and

for him, and for us, that he caught the air of the sunset upon his face. He read Spenser while Spenser was still the dominant influence in English poetry. "He hath confessed to me," said Dryden, "that Spenser was his original,"—an incredible statement unless we understand "original" in the sense of his earliest admiration. He read Shakespeare and Jonson in the first editions. He read Sylvester's translation of *Du Bartas*, *His Divine Weekes and Workes*; and perhaps thence conceived the first vague idea of a poem on a kindred subject. It is necessary to insist on his English masters, because, although the greater part of his time and study was devoted to the classics, the instrument that he was to use was learned in a native school. His metre, his magnificent vocabulary, his unerring phraseology, too learning and practice. He attached a high value to his study of English poetry. When he spoke of "our sage and serious Spenser (whom I dare Aquinas)," he was conscious that he was maintaining what seemed a bold paradox in an age when scholasticism still controlled education. It is pleasant to think of Milton during these years, whether in London or at Christ's College, in his "calm and pleasing solitariness, fed cheerful and confident thoughts," before even

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## MILTON

read well): And at last he had a Kinsman of his own (the excellentest Stage-player in all the country, and a good Gamester and good Fellow) that got Orders and supplied one of his Places. . . . After him another Neighbour's Son took Orders, when he had been a while an Attorney's Clerk, and a common Drunkard, and tipleed himself into so great Poverty that he had no other way to live. . . . These were the School-masters of my Youth . . . who read Common Prayer on Sundays and Holy Days, and taught School and tipleed on the Weekdays, and whipt the Boys when they were drunk, so that we changed them very oft. Within a few miles about us were near a dozen more Ministers that were near Eighty years old apiece, and never preached; poor ignorant Readers, and most of them of Scandalous Lives." Some few there were, Baxter admits, who preached in the neighbourhood, but any one who went to hear them "was made the Derision of the Vulgar Rabble under the odious Name of a *Puritane*."

In one of his Latin letters written from Cambridge, Milton himself speaks of the ignorance of those designed for the profession of divinity, how they knew little or nothing of literature and philosophy. The high prelacy and ritualism of Laud on the one hand, the Puritan movement on the other, each in some measure a protest against this state of things, were at fierce variance with each

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His notable early poems, written at College and during his retreat in Buckinghamshire, have therefore a singular interest and pathos. He was not long for the world in which these poems move with so ineffable a native grace. They are the poems of his youth, instinct with the sensibility of youth, and of a delicate and richly nurtured imagination. But they are also the poems of an age that was closing, and they have a touch of the sadness of evening. "I know not," says Dr. Johnson, speaking of *L'Allegro* and *Il Pensero*, "whether the characters are kept sufficiently apart, but I am afraid that I always meet some melancholy in his mirth." It is true; for both characters are Milton himself, who embodies in separate

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of his epic, as he had intended in his youthful days ; when chivalry and the spirit of chivalry had fought its last fight on English soil, full in the sight of all men, round the forlorn banner of King Charles? The policy of Laud and Strafford kept Milton out of the Church, and sent him into retirement at Horton ; the same policy, it may be plausibly conjectured, had something to do with the change in the subject of his long-meditated epic. From the very beginning of the civil troubles contemporary events leave their mark on all his writings. The topical bias (so to call it) is very noticeable in many of the subjects tentatively jotted down by him on the paper that is now in the library of Trinity College, Cambridge. The corrupted clergy, who make so splendid and, as some think, so irrelevant an appearance in *Lycidas*, figure frequently, either directly or by implication, in the long list of themes.

Without misgiving or regret, when the time came, Milton shut the gate on the sequestered paradise of his youth, and hastened downward to join the fighters in the plain. Before we follow him we may well "interpose a little ease" by looking at some of the beauties proper to the earlier poems, and listening to some of the simple pastoral melodies that were drowned when the organ began to blow. *L'Allegro* is full of them—

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Sometimes, with secure delight,  
The upland hamlets will invite,  
When the merry bells ring round,  
And the jocund rebecks sound  
To many a youth and many a maid  
Dancing in the chequered shade,  
And young and old come forth to play  
On a sunshine holiday.

✓ That is Merry England of Shakespeare's time. Merry  
Lyin  
But already the controversy concerning the Book ✓  
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the Maypole, that "great stinking idol," as an  
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destruction. Some years before *L'Allegro* was  
written, a bard, who hailed from Leeds, had lamented  
its downfall in the country of his nativity—

Happy the age, and harmlesse were the dayes,  
(For then true love and amity was found)  
When every village did a May-pole raise,  
And Whitson Ales and May games did abound:  
And all the lusty Yonkers in a rout  
With merry Lasses danced the rod about;  
Then friendship to their banquets bid the guests,  
And poor men far'd the better for their feasts.

✓ The next verse recalls that scene in *The Winter's  
Tale* where Shakespeare draws a vivid picture of  
Elizabethan country merrymaking—

The Lords of Castles, Mannors, Townes, and Towers  
Rejoyc'd when they beheld the Farmers flourish,  
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 Would fall in liking, and espouse her after  
 Unto his Serving-man, and for her portion  
 Bestow on him some farme, without extortion.

Alas poore Maypoles, what should be the cause  
 That you were almost banish't from the earth?  
 You never were rebellious to the lawes,  
 Your greatest crime was harmelesse honest mirth;  
 What fell malignant spirit was there found  
 To cast your tall *Piramides* to ground?

And you my native towne, which was of old,  
 (When as thy Bon-fires burn'd and May-poles stood,  
 And when thy Wassell-cups were uncontrol'd)  
 The Summer Bower of Peace and neighbourhood,  
 Although since these went down, thou ly'st forlorn,  
 By factious schismes and humours over-borne,  
 Some able hand I hope thy rod will raise,  
 That thou maist see once more thy happy daies.

The hopes of the bard of Leeds were fulfilled  
 at the Restoration. Merriment, of a sort, came  
 back to England; but it found no congenial accept-  
 ance from Milton. The Court roysterers, the  
 Hectors, Nickers, Scourers, and Mohocks, among  
 whom were numbered Sedley and Rochester, and  
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 account of Belial—

In courts and palaces he also reigns,  
 And in luxurious cities, where the noise

Of riot ascends above their loftiest towers,  
And injury and outrage; and, when night  
Darkens the streets, then wander forth the sons  
Of Belial, flown with insolence and wine.

The public festivals of these later days are  
glanced at in *Samson Agonistes*—

Lords are lordliest in their wine;  
And the well-feasted priest then soonest fired  
With zeal, if aught religion seem concerned;  
No less the people on their holy-days  
Impetuous, insolent, unquenchable.

There is no relaxation, no trace of innocent  
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—a world to which not only Shakespeare, but also laborious and arrogant poet-scholars like Jonson and Drayton had free right of entry. Milton, too, could write of the fairies—in his youth—

With stories told of many a feat,  
How Faery Mab the junkets eat.

But even in *Comus* the most exquisite passage of fairy description is put into the mouth of Comus himself, chief of the band of ugly-headed monsters in glistening apparel—

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,  
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move ;  
And on the tawny sands and shelves  
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.  
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,  
The wood-nymphs decked with daisies trim,  
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep :  
What hath night to do with sleep ?

✓ The song and the dance are broken off, never to be resumed, when the staid footfall of the lady is heard approaching. Milton cannot draw ugliness ; it turns into beauty or majesty on his hands. Satan has a large and enthusiastic party among readers of *Paradise Lost*. ✓ Comus, we are told stands for a whole array of ugly vices—riot, intemperance, gluttony, and luxury. But what delicate monster he is, and what a ravishing lyrical strain he is master of ! The pleasure that Milton forswore was a young god, the companion of Lo

and Youth, not an aged Silenus among the winekins. He viewed and described one whole realm of pagan loveliness, and then he turned his face the other way, and never looked back. Love is of the valley, and he lifted his eyes to the hills. His guiding star was not Christianity, which in its most characteristic and beautiful aspects had no fascination for him, but rather that severe and self-centred ideal of life and character which is called Puritanism. It is not a creed for weak natures; so that as the nominal religion of a whole populace it has inevitably fallen into some well-merited disrepute. Puritanism for him was not a body of law to be imposed outwardly on a gross and timid people, but an inspiration and a grace that falls from Heaven upon choice and rare natures—

Nor do I name of men the common rout,  
That, wandering loose about,  
Grow up and perish as the summer fly,  
Heads without name, no more remember'd;

so sings the Chorus in *Samson Agonistes*—

But such as thou hast solemnly elected,  
With gifts and graces eminently adorned,  
To some great work, thy glory,  
And people's safety, which in part they effect.

Under one form or another Puritanism is to be found in almost all religions, and in many systems of philosophy. Milton's Puritanism enabled him

—a world to which not only Shakespeare, but also laborious and arrogant poet-scholars like Jonson and Drayton had free right of entry. Milton, too, could write of the fairies—in his youth—

With stories told of many a feat,  
How Faery Mab the junkets eat.

But even in *Comus* the most exquisite passage of fairy description is put into the mouth of Comus himself, chief of the band of ugly-headed monsters in glistening apparel—

The sounds and seas, with all their finny drove,  
Now to the moon in wavering morrice move ;  
And on the tawny sands and shelves  
Trip the pert fairies and the dapper elves.  
By dimpled brook and fountain-brim,  
The wood-nymphs decked with daisies trim,  
Their merry wakes and pastimes keep :  
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Under one form or another Puritanism is to be found in almost all religions, and in many systems of philosophy. Milton's Puritanism enabled him

to combine his classical and Biblical studies, to reconcile his pagan and Christian admirations, Stoicism, and the Quakers. It was with no sense of incongruity that he gave to the Christ a speech in praise of—

Quintus, Fabricius, Curius, Regulus, . . .  
Who could do mighty things, and could contemn  
Riches, though offered from the hand of Kings.

To reject common ambitions, to refuse common enticements, to rule passions, desires, and fears, “neither to change, nor falter, nor repent,”—this was the wisdom and this the virtue that he set before himself. There is no beatific vision to keep his eyes from wandering among the shows of earth. Milton’s heaven is colder than his earth, the home of Titans, whose employ is political and martial. When his imagination deals with earthly realities, the noble melancholy of the Greeks lies upon it. His last word on human life might be translated into Greek with no straining and no loss of meaning—

His servants He, with new acquist  
Of true experience from this great event,  
With peace and consolation hath dismissed,  
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

He is therefore one of the few English poet (alone in this respect among the greatest) who have not sung of Love. His only English love

them, the sonnet *To the Nightingale*, is his earliest and poorest sonnet. He elected in his later poems to sing of Marriage, its foundation in reason, its utility, its respectability and antiquity as an institution, and, above all, its amazing dangers. He has thus lost the devotion of the young, who, while they read poetry by the ear and eye for its sonorous suggestions, and its processions of vague shapes, love Milton; but when they come to read it for its matter and sentiment, leave him—in most cases never to return. The atmosphere of his later poems is that of some great public institution. Heaven is an Oriental despotism. Hell is a Secession parliament. In the happy garden itself there is no privacy, no individualism; it is the focus of the action, the central point of the attack and the defence; and a great part of the conversation of its inhabitants turns on the regulations under which they live. They never forget that they are all mankind, and when their psalm goes up in grateful adoration to their Creator, it is like the unanimous voice of all nations and kindreds and people and tongues.

"The plan of *Paradise Lost*," says Johnson, "has this inconvenience, that it comprises neither human actions nor human manners. The man and woman who act and suffer are in a state which no other man and woman can ever know. The reader finds no transaction in which he can

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engaged ; beholds no condition in which he can by any effort of imagination place himself ; he has, therefore, little natural curiosity and sympathy." Milton, he goes on to explain, "knew human nature only in the gross, and had never studied the shades of character, nor the combinations of concurring or the perplexity of contending passions."

He knew human nature only in the gross. He treated nothing less momentous than the fortunes of the race. It is precisely from this cause that the incomparable grandeur of Milton's characters and situations springs. The conversations that he records are like international parleyings. Eve is the official Mother of mankind. Adam walks forth to meet the angel, in ambassadorial dignity the accredited representative of the human race—

Without more train  
Accompanied than with his own complete  
Perfections ; in himself was all his state,  
More solemn than the tedious pomp that waits  
On princes, when their rich retinue long  
Of horses led and grooms besmeared with gold  
Dazzles the crowd and sets them all agape.

And if the other characters of *Paradise Lost* of this generic stamp, it is because the chief character of all has it—the character of the poet himself. lends a strange dignity to the story of Milton's life that in all his doings he felt himself to

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 to his great Taskmaster, but also from time to  
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 ficiaries. Even in *Lycidas* he is thinking of  
 himself as much as of his dead companion—

So may some gentle Muse  
 With lucky words favour my destined urn,  
 And as he passes turn,  
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

What if he die young himself? Are his dreams  
 and hopes for his own future an illusion?  
 He agonises with the question in the famous  
digression on poetry and poetic fame. But he  
 consoles himself by appeal to a Court where the  
 success and the fame of this world are as straw in  
 the furnace; and then, having duly performed the  
 obsequies of his friend, with reinvigorated heart  
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Come, come ; no time for lamentation now,  
Nor much more cause. Samson hath quit himself  
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished  
A life heroic, on his enemies  
Fully revenged.

This overmastering sense of the cause breathes through all his numerous references to himself. He stands in the Forum,

Disturbed, yet comely, and in act  
Raised, as of some great matter to begin ;  
and addresses himself, as he boasts in *The Second Defence of the People of England*, to "the whole collective body of people, cities, states, and councils of the wise and eminent, through the wide expanse of anxious and listening Europe

Having sacrificed the use of his eyes to the service  
of the commonweal, he bates not a jot of heart or  
hope—

What supports me, dost thou ask?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
In Liberty's defence, my noble task,  
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.

And while thus his fighting years are filled with  
the exaltation of battle, as he plumes and lifts  
himself upon the cause that is going forward, the  
story of his closing years has in it much of the  
pathos of a lost cause. It was remarked by  
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Johnson doubtless intended, will not compare, for  
moving quality, with the matchless invocation to  
the Seventh Book—

More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged  
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,  
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,  
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,  
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou  
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when Morn  
Purples the East. Still govern thou my song,  
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✓ But drive far off the barbarous dissonance  
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race  
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard  
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears  
To rapture, till the savage clamour drowned  
Both harp and voice ; nor could the Muse defend  
Her son. So fail not thou, who thee implores ;  
For thou art heavenly, she an empty dream.

Disappointed of all his political hopes, living neglected and poor for fourteen years after the Restoration, and dying a private citizen, pa

obscure, Milton yet found and took a magnanimous  
venge upon his enemies. They had crippled  
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him of the rags of circumstance, and cleansed of  
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The *Philistian nobility* (or the Restoration notables)  
are described, with huge scorn, as ranged along  
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 their safety by the reptile grovelling in the dust  
 below—

But he, though blind of sight,  
 Despised, and thought extinguished quite,  
 With inward eyes illuminated,  
 His fiery virtue roused  
 From under ashes into sudden flame,  
 And as an evening dragon came,  
 Assailant on the perchèd roosts  
 And nests in order ranged  
 Of tame villatic fowl, but as an eagle  
 His cloudless thunder bolted on their heads.  
 So Virtue, given for lost,  
 Depressed and overthrown, as seemed,  
 Like that self-begotten bird  
 In the Arabian woods embost,  
 That no second knows nor third,  
 And lay crewhile a holocaust,  
 From out her ashy womb now teemed,  
 Revives, reflourishes, then vigorous most  
 When most unactive deemed ;  
 And, though her body die, her fame survives.  
 A secular bird, ages of lives.

## CHAPTER II

### THE PROSE WORKS

It is customary for the friends of Milton to approach his prose works with a sigh of apology. There is a deep-rooted prejudice among the English people against a poet who concerns himself intimately with politics. Whether this feeling has its origin in solicitude for the poet or for the politics is hard to determine; indeed it is pretty generally maintained that each is detrimental to the other. But seeing that for one man in the modern world who cares for poets there are at least ten who care for politics, it is safe to assume that the poets, when they are deprived of the franchise, are deprived rather to maintain the purity and efficiency of politics than for the good of their own souls. They have been compared to birds of Paradise, which were long believed to have no feet; and the common sense of the English people, with a touch of the municipal logic of Dogberry, has enacted that whereas they have no

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ins and penalties, to alight and walk. Their  
nction is to beautify the distant landscape with  
e flash of wings.

For most men common-sense is the standard,  
nd immediate utility the end, whereby they judge  
political questions, great and small. Now com-  
mon-sense judges only the questions that are  
brought home to it by instant example; and  
utility is appealed to for a verdict only amid the  
dense crowd of actual conflicting interests. Neither  
the one nor the other is far-sighted or imaginative.  
So it comes about that the political system, in  
England, at least, is built up piecemeal; it is  
founded on appetites and compromises, and mor-  
tared by immemorial habit. To explain this  
process, and to transfigure it in the pure light  
of imagination, was the work of the great poet-  
politician, Edmund Burke. But the poet usually  
goes a hastier way to work. Looking at the  
whole domiciliary structure from outside, he finds  
it shapeless and ugly, like an ant-heap; and  
volunteers to play the architect. His design treats  
the details of individual habit and happiness in  
strict subordination to the desired whole. What  
he wants is consistency, symmetry, dignity; and  
to achieve these he is willing to make a holocaust  
of human selfishnesses. He may be a deep scholar

and thinker, but he is apt to forget one point of ancient wisdom,—that it is the wearer of the shoe, and not the cobbler, who best knows where the shoe wrings him.

The speculations of the poet awaken no hostile resentment so long as they are admittedly abstract. He is at liberty to build his Republic, his City of the Sun, his Utopia, or his New Atlantis, amid the indifferent applause of mankind. But when his aim becomes practical and immediate, when he seeks to stir the heap by introducing into it the ruthless discomfort of an idea, a million littlenesses assail him with deadly enmity, and he is found sorrowfully protesting his amazement:—

I did but prompt the age to quit their clogs  
By the known rules of ancient liberty,  
When straight a barbarous noise environs me  
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs.

So he is brought, with great reluctance, to the estimate of men which is expressed by Milton in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*; “be slaves within doors, no wonder that they strive much to have the public state conform governed to the inward vicious rule whereby govern themselves. For indeed none can freedom heartily but good men.”

Milton cannot claim the exemption allowed to the theorist

feet, and have moreover been proved to have no feet, it shall be forbidden them, under the strictest pains and penalties, to alight and walk. Their function is to beautify the distant landscape with the flash of wings.

For most men common-sense is the standard, and immediate utility the end, whereby they judge political questions, great and small. Now common-sense judges only the questions that are brought home to it by instant example; and utility is appealed to for a verdict only amid the dense crowd of actual conflicting interests. Neither the one nor the other is far-sighted or imaginative. So it comes about that the political system, in England, at least, is built up piecemeal; it is founded on appetites and compromises, and mortared by immemorial habit. To explain this process, and to transfigure it in the pure light of imagination, was the work of the great poet-politician, Edmund Burke. But the poet usually goes a hastier way to work. Looking at the whole domiciliary structure from outside, he finds it shapeless and ugly, like an ant-heap; and volunteers to play the architect. His design treats the details of individual habit and happiness in strict subordination to the desired whole. What he wants is consistency, symmetry, dignity; and to achieve these he is willing to make a holocaust of human selfishnesses. He may be a deep scholar

nd thinker, but he is apt to forget one point of ancient wisdom,—that it is the wearer of the shoe, and not the cobbler, who best knows where the shoe wrings him.

The speculations of the poet awaken no hostile resentment so long as they are admittedly abstract. He is at liberty to build his Republic, his City of the Sun, his Utopia, or his New Atlantis, amid the indifferent applause of mankind. But when his aim becomes practical and immediate, when he seeks to stir the heap by introducing into it the ruthless discomfort of an idea, a million littlenesses assail him with deadly enmity, and he is found sorrowfully protesting his amazement:—

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It was in 1641, when already "the vigour of the Parliament had begun to humble the pride of the bishops," that he first intervened. "I saw," he says, "that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty; that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of mankind from the yoke of slavery and superstition. . . . I perceived that if I ever wished to be of use, I ought at least not to be wanting to my country, to the church and to so many of my fellow-Christians, in a crisis of so much danger; I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object." So he wrote the treatise in two books *Of Reformation in England, and the causes t*

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It will readily be seen that on almost all these questions Milton was not only—to use the foolish modern phrase—"in advance of his time," but also considerably in advance of ours. Twenty years after his death the Licensing Acts were abolished; for the rest, his reforms are yet to accomplish. It is an odd remark of one of his learned biographers that the *Areopagitica* is the only one of all Milton's prose writings "wh

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topic is not obsolete." It is the only one of his prose writings whose thesis commands the general assent of modern readers, and is, therefore, from his own practical point of view, obsolete.

The mere enumeration of his opinions suffices to show that Milton's is a sad case of the poet in politics. The labours of the twenty prime years of his manhood have been copiously bewailed. To have Pegasus in harness is bad enough; but when the waggon that he draws is immovably stuck in the mud, and he himself bespattered by his efforts, the spectacle is yet more pitiable. Many of his critics have expressed regret that he did not make for himself an artificial seclusion, and continue his purely poetical labours, with the classics for companions. The questions that drew him into politics were burning questions, it is true; but were there not others to deal with them, good earnest, sensible, homely people? Samuel Butler has enumerated some of those who were dedicating their time and thought to politics at this important crisis:—

The oyster-women locked their fish up,  
And trudged away to cry "No Bishop";  
The mouse-trap men laid save-alls by,  
And 'gainst ev'l counsellors did cry;  
Botchers left old cloaths in the lurch,  
And fell to turn and patch the Church;  
Some cried the Covenant, instead  
Of pudding-pies and ginger-bread,

And some for brooms, old boots and shoes,  
Bawled out to purge the Common-house :  
Instead of kitchen-stuff, some cry  
A gospel-preaching ministry ;  
And some for old shirts, coats or cloak,  
No surplices nor service-book ;  
A strange harmonious inclination  
Of all degrees to reformation.

But what was Milton doing in this malodorous and noisy assembly? Might he not with all confidence have left the Church to the oyster-women, and the State to the mouse-trap men? The company that he kept with them ruined his manners; he had to speak loud in order to be heard, to speak broad in order to be respected; and so (bitterest thought of all!) he lost something of that sweet reasonableness which is a poet's proper grace.

The answer to this strain of criticism is to be found in the study of Milton's works, poetry and prose—and perhaps best in the poetry. We could not have had anything at all like *Paradise Lost* from a dainty, shy poet-scholar; nor anything on this tenure, that they shall not husband it because the occasion that presents itself, although worthy of high effort, is not answerable to the refinement of their tastes. Milton, it is too often forgotten, was an Englishman. He held the privilege and the trust not cheap. When G

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There is plenty of "verbal curiosity" in Milton's poetry; he is in some respects the finest craftsman who ever handled the English speech: so that this declaration is the more timely to remind us by how wide a chasm he is separated from those modern greenhouse poets who move contentedly in an atmosphere of art ideals and art theories. He had his breeding from the ancient world, where Æschylus fought at Marathon, and he could not think of politics as of a separable part of human life.

To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Næra's hair,

is a lyric ideal that may quite well consist with

political indifference, but how should an epic inspiration be nourished where the prosperity of the State is lightly esteemed? Even had poetry lost by his political adventures, he would have been content that politics should gain. And politics did gain; for Milton's prose works raise every question they touch, even where they cannot truly be said to advance it. It is as unseemly for the politicians to complain of his choice, as it would be for the herdsmen of King Admetus to complain of the presence among them of a god. The large considerations and high passions imported into the treatment of practical questions by a Milton, or a Burke, have done much to keep even party politics at a high level in England, so that civil servants and journalists may join in the hymn of the herdsmen—

He has been our fellow, the morning of our days,  
Us he chose for house-mates, and this way went.

God, of whom music  
And song and blood are pure,  
The day is never darkened  
That had thee here obscure!

In a long autobiographic passage in the *Second Defence of the People of England* Milton makes a formal classification of his prose works written before that date. All of them, he says, were designed to promote Liberty. By the accidents of the time he was induced to treat first, in his

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anti-episcopal pamphlets, of religious liberty. Once that controversy was fairly ablaze, in the name of the same goddess he applied his incendiary torch to humbler piles. "I perceived," he says, "that there were three species of liberty which are essential to the happiness of social life—religious, domestic, and civil; and as I had already written concerning the first, and the magistrates were strenuously active in obtaining the third, I determined to turn my attention to the second, or the domestic species." He includes in this division of his work the *Divorce* pamphlets, the tractate *Of Education*, and the *Areopagitica*, as dealing with the "three material questions" (so he calls them) of domestic liberty, namely, "the conditions of the conjugal tie, the education of the children, and the free publication of the thoughts."

It seems a strange conception of domestic liberty which makes it rest on a threefold support—divorce at will, an unrestrained printing-press, and the encyclopædic education of polyglot children. But the truth is that Milton's classification is an after-thought. The pamphlets whose names were all written by him much about the same time, between 1643 and 1645; but the history of their origin is more interesting and symmetrical than the later invented scheme of classification. The *Divorce* pamphlets were written because Milton was unhappily married.

The *Areopagitica* was written because his heterodox views concerning marriage had brought him into collision with the Presbyterian censors of the press. His treatise on education was written because he had undertaken the education of his own nephews, and had become deeply interested in that question. In all three his own experience is the first motive ; in all three that experience is concealed beneath a formidable array of general considerations, dogmatically propounded.

The case is the same with regard to the pamphlets that treat of religious and civil liberty ; they are not only occasional, but intensely personal, even in their origins. The earliest of them, the five ecclesiastical pamphlets of the year 1641, deal with a question which had been of intimate concern to Milton ever since the beginning of his Cambridge days. The celebrated controversy with Salmasius and his abettors, concerning the death of King Charles, is a gladiatorial combat from which every element save the personal is often absent. In these bouts offensive biography and defensive autobiography serve for sword and shield. This personal character of the prose writings, while it has repelled some readers interested mainly in the questions discussed, has attracted others who are interested chiefly in the writer. A rich harvest of personal allusion has been gathered from the controversial treatises, and perhaps, even now, the

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“I cannot better liken the state and person of a king than to that mighty Nazarite Samson ; who being disciplined from his birth in the precepts and the practice of temperance and sobriety, without the strong drink of injurious and excessive desires, grows up to a noble strength and perfection with those his illustrious and sunny locks, the laws, waving and curling about his god-like shoulders. And while he keeps them about him undiminished and unshorn, he may with the jawbone of an ass, that is, with the word of his meanest officer, suppress and put to confusion thousands of those that rise against his just power. But laying down his head among the strumpet flatteries of prelates, while he sleeps and thinks no harm, they, wickedly shaving off all those bright and weighty tresses of his law, and just prerogative which were his ornament and strength, deliver him over to indirect and violent counsels, which, as the

Philistines, put out the fair and far-sighted eyes of his natural discerning, and make him grind in the prison-house of their sinister ends and practices upon him : till he, knowing this prelatical razor to have bereft him of his wonted might, nourish again his puissant hair, the golden beams of law and right ; and they, sternly shook, thunder with ruin upon the heads of those his evil counsellors, but not without great affliction to himself."

This ingenious allegorical application naturally finds no place in the grave poem of Milton's latest years. And yet, in one passage at least, his earlier love for the high-figured style took him captive again. The strong drink from which the Samson of the play abstains is strong drink, not "injurious and excessive desires." There is no hint of prelatical conspiracy in the enticements of Dalila. But perhaps some faint reminiscence of his earlier fable concerning Samson's hair recurred to Milton's mind when he gave to Manoa a speech comparing the locks of the hero to the strength, not of the law, but of a nation in arms :—

And I persuade me God had not permuted  
His strength again to grow up with his hair,  
Garrisoned round about him like a camp  
Of faithful soldiery, were not his purpose  
To use him further yet in some great service.

The theme of *Samson Agonistes* had thus already taken possession of Milton's imagination when he

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His strength again to grow up with his hair,  
Grown up as I have seen it grow.

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The theme of *Samson Agonistes* had thus already taken possession of Milton's imagination when he

wrote his first prose tractates. But the same writings furnish even stronger evidence of his early dallings with the theme of *Paradise Lost*. "It was from out the rind of one apple tasted," he says in the *Areopagitica*, "that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world." And again, in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*:—"The academics and stoics . . . knew not what a consummate and most adorned Pandora was bestowed upon Adam, to be the nurse and guide of his arbitrary happiness and perseverance, I mean, his native innocence and perfection, which might have kept him from being our true Epimetheus." Some of these references show the imaginative scheme of the *Paradise Lost* in the process of building. In one passage, for instance, of the last quoted treatise, Milton expounds the pagan belief that God punishes his enemies most when he throws them furthest from him:—"Which then they held he did, when he blinded, hardened, and stirred up his offenders, to finish and pile up their desperate work since they had undertaken it. To banish for ever into a local hell, whether in the air or in the centre, or in that uttermost and bottomless gulf of chaos, deeper from holy bliss than the world's diameter multiplied, they thought not a punishing so proper and proportionate for God to inflict as to punish sin with sin." I

would seem as if the poet had not as yet fixed the situation of his local hell, but remained suspended between rival theories. The other idea, of the Divine permission and impulse given to hardened sinners, finds a conspicuous place in the poem. In one instance, at least, a figure drawn from the story of the Creation is violently handled to serve strange uses. The evolution of the four elements from the chaotic welter of hot, cold, moist, and dry, is adduced as a proof that the laws of God and of nature approve free divorce:—"By his divorcing command the world first rose out of chaos, nor can be renewed again out of confusion, but by the separating of unmeet consorts."

Allusions of this kind occur most frequently in the earlier prose writings, while the studies that had been interrupted by controversy were yet fresh in Milton's memory. They would hardly be worth the quotation, were it not that they are another evidence of the transparency of his mind. In looking through his prose works you see traces of all that was engaging his imagination and thought at the time. Poetry is the highest of expressive arts; and poets are the worst dissemblers or economisers of truth in the world. Their knowledge, like their feeling, possesses them, and must find expression as argument, or illustration, or figure, whatever the immediate matter in hand. The prose works of Milton are thus, from first to

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On she came,  
 Led by her Heavenly Maker, though unseen,  
 And guided by his voice, nor uninformed  
 Of nuptial sanctity, and marriage rites.

Even at so wide a remove of time, the poet's wounded pride finds expression in this singular theory—or, rather, in this more than dubious piece of self-justification.

But although the hurt he had suffered, in most susceptible feelings, gives eloquence and plangency to his divorce pamphlets, it was merely to voice his sufferings that he wrote t

pamphlets. Most men in Milton's position, married to "a nothing, a desertrice, an adversary," would have recognised that theirs was one of those exceptional cases for which the law cannot provide, and would have sat down under their unhappy chance, to bear it or mitigate it as best they might. Some poets of the time of the Romantic Revival would have claimed the privilege of genius to be a law unto itself; the law of the State being designed for the common rout, whose lesser sensibilities and weaker individuality make them amenable to its discipline. Milton did neither the one thing nor the other. The modern idolatry of genius was as yet uninvented; he was a citizen first, a poet and an unhappy man afterwards. He directed his energies to proving, not that he should be exempted from the operation of the law, but that the law itself should be changed. He had entered into marriage, with full ceremonial ushering, by the main door; he would go out the same way, or not at all. Thus even in this most personal matter he pleads, not for himself, but for the commonweal. He cannot conceive of happiness as of a private possession, to be secretly enjoyed; it stands rooted, like justice, in the wise and equal ordinances of the State; and the only freedom that he values is freedom under the law.

Like the citizen of some antique state, he discourses of marriage in the market-place. In his

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But although his pamphlets are both occasional and personal, and even address themselves at times to conciliation and persuasion, the views that they advocate and the system of thought that underlies them were not the products of time and accident. Milton was an idealist, pure and simple.

in politics. Had he lived under the Tudor sovereigns, he would have been reduced, with Sir Thomas More, Montaigne, and John Barclay, the author of *Argenis*, to express himself by way of romance and allegory. It was his fortune to live at a time when the Tudor state system was breaking up with appalling suddenness, and along with it the Tudor compromise in the affairs of the Church, imposed from above upon an unawakened people, was falling into wreckage. Here was an opportunity that has not often, in the world's history, come to a poet, of realising the dream that he had dreamed in his study, of setting up again, for the admiration and comfort of posterity, the model of an ancient Republic.

The best of all Milton's critics has left us the worst account of his political opinions. Johnson's censure of *Lycidas*, much as it has been ridiculed and decried, is judicious and discerning compared with his explanation of Milton's political creed:—  
"Milton's republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence, in petulance impatient of control, and pride disdainful of superiority. He hated monarchs in the State, and prelates in the Church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey. It is to be suspected that his predominant desire was to destroy, rather than establish, and that he felt not so much the love of liberty as

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repugnance to authority." It may, at least, be credited to Johnson for moderation, that he requires only four of the Seven Deadly Sins, to wit, Pride, Envy, Anger, and Sloth, to explain Milton's political tenets. Had he permitted himself another sentence, an easy place might surely have been made for Gluttony, Luxury, and Covetousness, the three whose absence cannot fail to be remarked by any lover of thorough and detailed treatment in these intricate problems of human character.

If, in our more modern fashion, we seek for the origin of Milton's ideas in his education, his habits of thought, and his admirations, we shall be obliged to admit that they are all rooted in his conception of the ancient City State. It was the wish of Thomas Hobbes to abolish the study of Greek and Latin in our schools and colleges, because this study fosters a love of freedom, and unfits men to be the subjects of an absolute monarch. His happiest illustration would have been the case of his contemporary, Milton. Yet in all Milton's writings there is no trace of the modern democratic doctrine of equality. A hearing is all that he claims. So far from hating greatness, he carries his admiration for it, for personal virtue and prowess, almost to excess. The poet who described the infernal conclave in the Second Book of *Paradise Lost* was not likely to be insensible to the

part played in politics by men of eminent and dominating personality. To think of free government as of an engine for depressing unusual merit was impossible for Milton. He lived in an age that had found in Plutarch's men its highest ideals of political character. Never, since their own day, had the "noble Grecians and Romans" exercised so irresistible a fascination on the minds of men, or so real an influence on the affairs of the State, as was theirs at the time of the Renaissance. The mist in which they had long been enveloped was swept away, and these colossal figures of soldiers, patriots, and counsellors loomed large and clear across the ages, their majesty enhanced by distance and by art, which conspire to efface all that is accidental, petty, and distracting. We cannot see these figures as they appeared to the Renaissance world. One of the chief results of modern historical labour and research has been that it has peopled the Middle Ages for us, and interposed a whole society of living men, our ancestors, between us and ancient Rome. But in Milton's time this process was only beginning; the collections and researches that made it possible were largely the work of his contemporaries, — and were despised by him. When he looked back on the world's history, from his own standpoint, he saw, near at hand and stretching away into the distance, a desert, from which a black mass of cloud had just been lifted;

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and, across the desert, lying fair under the broad sunshine, a city—

With gilded battlements, conspicuous far,  
Turrets and terrasses, and glittering spires.

It was towards this ancient civic life, with its arts and arms and long renown, that he reached forth passionate hands of yearning. The intervening tract, whither his younger feet had wandered, almost ceased to exist for him; the paladins and ladies of mediæval story were the deceitful mirage of the desert; the true life of antiquity lay beyond. In all his allusions to the great themes of romance two things are noticeable: first, how deeply his imagination had been stirred by them, so that they are used as a last crown of decoration in some of the most exalted passages of his great poems; and next, how careful he is to stamp them as fiction. His studies for the early *History of Britain* had cloyed him with legends conveyed from book to book. Once convinced that no certain historical ground could be found for the feet among the whole mass of these traditions, Milton ceased to regard them as eligible subjects for his greatest poem. But their beauty dwelt with him; the memory of the embattled chivalry of Arthur and Charlemagne recurs to him when he is seeking for the topmost reach of human power and splendour that he may belittle it by the side of Satan's rebel

host; and the specious handmaidens who served the Tempter's phantom banquet in the desert are described as lovely beyond what has been

Fabled since  
Of fairy damsels met in forest wide  
By Knights of Logres, or of Lyones,  
Lancelot, or Pelleas, or Pellenore.

If Milton's attitude to mediæval romance is one of regretful suspicion, his attitude to the greatest of mediæval institutions is one of bitter contempt. He inveighs even against the "antiquitarians," such as Camden, who, he says, "cannot but love bishops as well as old coins and his much lamented monasteries, for antiquity's sake." For near twelve hundred years these same bishops "have been in England to our souls a sad and doleful succession of illiterate and blind guides." It is needless to multiply extracts illustrative of Milton's opinions on the Church; behind the enormous wealth of rhetoric and invective poured forth in his pamphlets, the opinions that he holds are few and simple. When he had been disappointed by the Presbyterians, and had finally turned from them, his beliefs inclined more and more, in two points at least, to the tenets of the newly arisen sect of Quakers—to a pure spiritualism in religion, and the complete separation of Church and State. His horror of war he never shared. The model of the Church he sought in the earliest

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The lodestar of his hopes is liberty, his main end the establishment of "a free commonwealth." He knows as well as Montesquieu that democracy in its pristine dignity can be erected only on a wide foundation of public virtue. "To govern well," he declares in the treatise *Of Reformation in England*, "is to train up a nation in true wisdom and virtue, and that which springs from thence, magnanimity (take heed of that), and that which is our beginning, regeneration, and happiest end, likeness to God, which in one word we call godliness; . . . other things follow as the shadow does the substance." In the same pamphlet this envious hater of greatness remarks that "to govern a nation piously and justly, which only is to say happily, is for a spirit of the greatest size, and divinest mettle." And men worthy of this description had, as it seemed to him, arisen in his own time. His praise of Cromwell and the leaders associated with him is almost extravagant

in its enthusiasm. "While you, O Cromwell, are left among us, he hardly shows a proper confidence in the Supreme, who distrusts the security of England, when he sees that you are in so special a manner the favoured object of the Divine regard." His mind is full of the achievements of Cyrus, Epaminondas, and Scipio; he denies to the Protector no honour that may be drawn from these high comparisons. And then, as in *Lycidas*, so also in *The Second Defence of the People of England*, Milton concludes his celebration of another by a return to himself and his pride in a duty fulfilled. Opportunity, he declares, is offered for great achievements; if it be not seized, posterity will judge "that men only were wanting for the execution; while they were not wanting who could rightly counsel, exhort, inspire, and bind an unfading wreath of praise round the brows of the illustrious actors in so glorious a scene."

In the measures that he recommends to Cromwell as necessary for the public welfare, his mistakes are the generous errors of an idealist. He writes as if all were either Cromwells or Miltons, and worthy of the fullest measure of liberty. "Now the time seems come," he exclaims, "wherein Moses, the great prophet, may sit in heaven rejoicing to see that memorable and glorious wish of his fulfilled, when not only our

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me prophets." His general propositions on  
function of law are unimpeachable. "He  
o wisely would restrain the reasonable soul of  
an within due bounds, must first himself know  
perfectly how far the territory and dominion  
extends of just and honest liberty. As little must  
he offer to bind that which God hath loosened  
as to loosen that which He hath bound. The  
ignorance and mistake of this high point hath  
heaped up one huge half of all the misery that  
hath been since Adam." But with the application  
to issues of the day it appears that the mistake has  
been all one way. "Laws are usually worse in  
proportion as they are more numerous." The  
free spirit of man can govern him without "a  
garrison upon his neck of empty and over-dignified  
precepts."

Whether he treat of religion, of education, of  
divorce, or of civil government, the error is always  
the same, a confidence too absolute in the capacity  
and integrity of the reasonable soul of man. A  
liturgy, for example, is intolerable, because it is  
slur upon the extemporary effusions of ministers  
of the Gospel. "Well may men of eminent gifts  
set forth as many forms and helps to prayer  
they please; but to impose them on ministers  
lawfully called and sufficiently tried . . . is a su-  
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themselves." Milton, we know, did not habitually attend public worship at any of the conventicles of the sectaries, or perhaps he might have found reason to modify this censure.

Some of his impassioned pleadings were possibly not wholly without effect on the politics of the time. It is interesting, at any rate, to find Cromwell, in his letter written in 1650 to the Governor of Edinburgh Castle, adopting one of the main arguments of the *Areopagitica*, and enforcing it against the Presbyterians by a figure which may have been borrowed from that tract. "Your pretended fear," he writes, "lest error should step in, is like the man who would keep all wine out of the country lest men should be drunk." It will be found an unjust and unwise jealousy to deprive a man of his natural liberty upon a supposition that he may abuse it. When he doth abuse it, judge." But Cromwell never applied his logic to the removal of the restraint upon printing, which by this same argument Milton had judged to be "the greatest displeasure and indignity to a free and knowing spirit that can be put upon him." He was too practical a statesman to be frightened into logic by a little paper shot.

Logical Milton always was. He learned little or nothing from the political events of his time. He was throughout consistent with himself; prepared to take any risks that his advocacy

seventy elders, but all the Lord's people, are become prophets." His general propositions on the function of law are unimpeachable. "He who wisely would restrain the reasonable soul of man within due bounds, must first himself know perfectly how far the territory and dominion extends of just and honest liberty. As little must he offer to bind that which God hath loosened as to loosen that which He hath bound. The ignorance and mistake of this high point hath heaped up one huge half of all the misery that hath been since Adam." But with the application to issues of the day it appears that the mistake has been all one way. "Laws are usually worse in proportion as they are more numerous." The free spirit of man can govern him without "a garrison upon his neck of empty and over-dignified precepts."

Whether he treat of religion, of education, of divorce, or of civil government, the error is always the same, a confidence too absolute in the capacity and integrity of the reasonable soul of man. A liturgy, for example, is intolerable, because it is a slur upon the extemporaneous effusions of ministers of the Gospel. "Well may men of eminent gifts set forth as many forms and helps to prayer as they please; but to impose them on ministers lawfully called and sufficiently tried . . . is a supercilious tyranny, impropriating the Spirit of God to

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might bring upon him, not prepared to forego or modify his opinions because of human incompetence or human imbecility. Between the consistent and unflinching Royalists on the one hand, and the consistent and unflinching Republicans on the other, the most of the population of England wavered and hung. But half-measures and half-heartedness were alike unintelligible to Milton. He fell upon the Presbyterians when they showed a disposition to palter with the logical consequences of their own action, and scourged them unmercifully. They had "banded and borne arms against their king, divested him, disanointed him, nay, cursed him all over in their pulpits, and their pamphlets." But when once the king was brought to trial, then "he who but erewhile in the pulpits was a cursed tyrant, an enemy to God and saints, laden with all the innocent blood spilt in three kingdoms, and so to be fought against, is now, though nothing penitent or altered from his first principles, a lawful magistrate, a sovereign lord, the Lord's anointed, not to be touched, though by themselves imprisoned." He prepares for them a similar dilemma, between the horns of which they have since been content to dwell, in his treatment of the question of divorce: "They dare not affirm marriage is either a sacrament or a mystery and yet they invest it with such an awful sanc-

and give it such adamantine chains to bind with, as if it were to be worshipped like some Indian deity, when it can confer no blessing upon us, but works more and more to our misery."

Milton's astonishment and indignation in cases like these are a convincing evidence of his inability to understand average politics, and that world of convenience, precaution, and compromise which is their native place. His own tenacity and constancy have something grim about them. Andrew Marvell, in his tract called *The Rehearsal Transposed*, speaking of the intolerance of his adversary, Samuel Parker, says: "If you have a mind to die, or to be of his party (there are but these two conditions), you may perhaps be rendered capable of his charity." Neither of these two conditions was a certain title to the charity of Milton. In the *Eikonoklastes* he pursues the dead king with jibe and taunt, and exults over the smallest advantage gained. The opening words of the tract show him conscious of the difficulty and delicacy of the part he acted in making war on one who had "paid his final debt to nature and his faults." But what then? If the king, being dead, could speak, the dead king must be answered, and his gauntlet taken up "in the behalf of liberty and the common-wealth."

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More was famous for his knack of calling bad names in good Latin, yet his posterity rise up and call him blessed. Milton, like More, observed the rules of the game, which allowed practices condemned in the modern literary prize-ring. He calls Salmasius a poor grammarian, a pragmatical coxcomb, a silly little scholar, a mercenary advocate, a loggerhead, a hare-brained blunderbuss, a witless brawler,\* a mongrel cur; he reproaches him with the domestic tyranny put upon him by that barking she-wolf, his wife, and winds up with an elaborate comparison (not wholly unfamiliar to modern methods of controversy) between Salmasius and Judas. With his nameless opponent in the Divorce quarrel he deals—this time in English—no less contemptuously: "I mean not to dispute philosophy with this pork, who never read any." The creature is a conspicuous gull, an odious fool, a dolt, an idiot, a groom, a rank pettifogger, a presumptuous losel, a clown, a vice, a huckster-at-law, whose "jabberment is the flashiest and the fustiest that ever corrupted in such an unswilled hogshead." "What should a man say more to a snout in this pickle? What language can be low and degenerate enough?" In the *Apology* for Smectymnuus, Milton sets forth his own defence of his acrimony and violence: "There may be a sanctified bitterness," he remarks, "against the enemies of the

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truth ;" and he dares to quote the casuistry of Electra in *Sophocles* :—

'Tis you that say it, not I. You do the deeds,  
And your ungodly deeds find me the words.

The exigencies of controversy revealed in Milton not only an inexhaustible store of coarse invective, but also, at times, the flash of real wit. "My fate," he says, with some sense of the incongruity of the thing, "extorts from me a talent of sport, which I had thought to hide in a napkin." We are privileged to hear Milton laugh. It is not mirthful nor gentle laughter, but rather the fierce, harsh, vehement laughter of the Hebrew Psalms, the laughter of scorn, the shooting out of the lips, the saying "Ha, ha." He speaks with his mouth, and swords are in his lips. Thus, of Alexander Morus, Professor of Sacred History at Amsterdam, whom he suspected to be the author of a tract in support of Salmasius, he says : "There is one More, part Frenchman and part Scot, so that one country or one people cannot be quite overwhelmed with the whole infamy of his extraction" ; and he indulges himself in a debauch of punning on *Morus*, the Latin word for a mulberry. In the prelatical controversy, after discussing with his opponent the meaning of the word "angel," he continues : "It is not ordination nor jurisdiction that is angelical, but the heavenly message of the

Gospel, which is the office of all ministers alike. . . . And if you will contend still for a superiority in one person, you must ground it better than from this metaphor, which you may now deplore as the axe-head that fell into the water, and say, 'Alas, master! for it was borrowed'; unless you have as good a faculty to make iron swim, as you had to make light froth sink." In the *Apology* for Smectymnuus he heaps one grotesque comparison on another. His adversary, the son of Bishop Hall, is like "some empiric of false accusations to try his poisons upon me, whether they would work or not." The learning that was displayed by the champion of Episcopacy and the very typographical arrangement of his book incur an equal contempt: the margin of his treatise "is the sluice most commonly that feeds the drought of his text. . . . Nor yet content with the wonted room of his margin, but he must cut out large docks and creeks into his text, to unlade the foolish frigate of his unseasonable authorities." His best folios "are predestined to no better end than to make winding-sheets in Lent for pilchers." With this last stroke Milton is so well pleased that he repeats the same prediction in an elaborated form over the works of Salmasius, and even celebrates in numerous verse the forethought and bounty of one who has thus taken pity on the enakedness of fishes.

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The fantastic nature of these quips and taunts reminds us that Milton belonged to the age of the metaphysical poets and satirists, the age of Cowley, and Cleveland, and Butler. His prose works have been searched chiefly for passages that may be used to illustrate his poetry; and although the search has been rewarded with many natural coincidences of expression, not a few passages of lofty self-confidence, and some raptures of poetic metaphor, the result has been in the main a disappointment. His admirers, too jealous for the poetic dignity of their hero, have turned away sorrowfully from this memorial heap of odd-shaped missiles, hurled from his dire left hand for the confusion of his enemies. And yet, rightly judged, there is instruction, and an increased reverence for the poet, to be found in these also—in all that wild array of subjects and methods which he commands for the purposes of his prose, but dismisses from the service of his verse. It was a strict and rare selection that he made among the auxiliaries when he addressed himself to the more arduous attempt. Here and there, even in *Paradise Lost*, his education in the handling of satire and invective stood him in stead. The poem contains more than one "flying"—to use the Scottish term—and the high war of words between Satan and Abdiel in heaven, or between Satan and Gabriel on earth, could not have been

handled save by a master of all the weapons of verbal fence and all the devices of wounding invective. In the great close of the Fourth Book, especially, where the arch-fiend and the archangel retaliate defiance, and tower, in swift alternate flights, to higher and higher pitches of exultant scorn, Milton puts forth all his strength, and brings into action a whole armoury of sarcasm and insult whetted and polished from its earlier prosaic exercise. Even the grotesque element in his humour is not wholly excluded from the *Paradise Lost*; it has full scope, for once, in the episodic description of the Paradise of Fools—that barren continent, beaten on by the storms of chaos, dark save for some faint glimmerings from the wall of heaven, the inhabitants a disordered and depraved multitude of philosophers, crusaders, monks, and friars, blown like leaves into the air by the winds that sweep those desert tracts. Unlike the Paradise that was lost, this paradise is wholly of Milton's invention, and is the best extant monument to that spirit of mockery and savage triumph which is all the humour that he knows.

The style of his prose works is a style formed upon oratorical models. The long winding sentence, propped on epithets and festooned with digressions, was the habitual vehicle of his meaning. The effect it produces at was well described by Marvell, who, in

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## THE PROSE WORKS

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The balance of epithet, the delicate music, the  
sentence that resembles a chain with link added to  
link rather than a hoop whose ends are welded  
together by the hammer—these are the character-  
istics of Milton's prose. They are illustrated  
in that short passage of the *Areopagitica*, well  
known to all readers of English: "I cannot  
praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised  
and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks  
her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where  
that immortal garland is to be run for, not without  
dust and heat." Or in the striking description of  
London during the Civil War: "Behold now this  
vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion-house of  
liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his  
protection; the shop of war hath not there more  
anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the  
plates and instruments of armed justice in defence  
of beleaguered truth, than there be pens and heads  
there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing  
searching, revolving new notions and ideas where  
with to present, as with their homage and their

fealty, the approaching reformation; others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and conviction.

This sonorous balance of phrase and epithet cannot always escape what Milton himself calls "the heathenish battology of multiplying words." It serves the uses of rhetoric rather than of logic, and by the fervour of its repetitions and enlargements unfits his prose for the plainer purposes of argument or exposition. His argument is sometimes destroyed or blemished by the fire that it kindles, his narrative overwhelmed in the tide of passions that it sways.

His vocabulary is extraordinarily rich, and here again the contrast is great between his prose and his verse. A full-bodied and picturesque dictionary might be made of the words that occur only in the prose. Most of these words would be found to derive from the Saxon stock, which yields him almost all his store of invective and vituperation. The resources of his Latinised vocabulary enable him to rise by successive gyrations to a point of vantage above his prey, and then the downward rush that strikes the quarry is a Saxon monosyllable. In this cardinal point of art for those who have to do with the English speech he became the teacher of Burke, who, with a lesser wealth of Saxon at his command, employed it with a more telling ursimony.

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The balance of epithet, the delicate music, the sentence that resembles a chain with link added to link rather than a hoop whose ends are welded together by the hammer—these are the characteristics of Milton's prose. They are illustrated in that short passage of the *Areopagitica*, well known to all readers of English: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." Or in the striking description of London during the Civil War: "Behold now this vast city, a city of refuge, the mansion-house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers working, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their

fealty, the approaching reformation; others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement."

This sonorous balance of phrase and epithet cannot always escape what Milton himself calls "the heathenish battology of multiplying words." It serves the uses of rhetoric rather than of logic, and by the fervour of its repetitions and enlargements unfits his prose for the plainer purposes of argument or exposition. His argument is sometimes destroyed or blemished by the fire that it kindles, his narrative overwhelmed in the tide of passions that it sways.

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Milton avoids no word of humble origin, so it serve his purpose. His contempt finds voice in such expressions as to "huddle" prayers, and to "keck" at wholesome food. Gehazi "rooks" from Naaman; the bishops "prog and pander for fees," and are "the common stales to countenance every politic fetch that was then on foot." The Presbyterians were earnest enough "while pluralities greased them thick and deep"; the gentlemen who accompanied King Charles in his assault on the privileges of the House of Commons were "the spawn and shipwreck of taverns and dicing-houses." The people take their religion from their minister "by scraps and mammocks, as he dispenses it in his Sunday's dole"; and "the superstitious man by his good will is an atheist, but being scared from thence by the pangs and gripes of a boiling conscience, all in a pudder shuffles up to himself such a God and such a worship as is most agreeable to remedy his fear."

There were few incidents in Milton's career from his personal relations with his college tutor to his choice of blank verse for his epic, that he was not called upon at some time or other in his life to explain and defend. When his free use of homely figures and turns of speech was objected to him, his answer was ready: "Doth not Christ Himself teach the highest things by the similitude

of old bottles and patched clothes? Doth He not illustrate best things by things most evil? His own coming to be as a thief in the night, and the righteous man's wisdom to that of an unjust steward?" But the defence is misleading, for the rules that governed Milton's usage are not what it would suggest. When he came to treat of the best and highest things his use of native English became more sparing and dainty, while the rank, strong words that smack of the home soil were all foregone.

His prose works, therefore, help us to appreciate better the tribulations of the process whereby he became a classic poet. Eclecticism and the severe castigation of style are dangerous disciplines for any but a rich temperament; from others they produce only what is exquisite and thin and vapid. The "stylist" of the modern world is generally an interesting invalid; his complexion would lose all its transparency if it were exposed to the weather; his weak voice would never make itself heard in the hubbub of the bazaar. Sunbeams cannot be extracted from cucumbers, nor can the great manner in literature emanate from a chill self-culture. But Milton inherited the fulness and vigour of the Elizabethans, and so could afford to write an epic poem in a selection of the language really used by men. The grandeur of *Paradise Lost* or *Samson Agonistes* could never, by any conceivable

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of chemistry or magic, be compounded from delicate sensibilities and a superfine ear for music. For the material of those palaces whole provinces were pillaged, and the waste might furnish forth a city.

## CHAPTER III

### PARADISE LOST : THE SCHEME

A PREROGATIVE place among the great epics of the world has sometimes been claimed for *Paradise Lost*, on the ground that the theme it handles is yaster and of a more universal human interest than any handled by Milton's predecessors. It concerns itself with the fortunes, not of a city or an empire, but of the whole human race, and with that particular event in the history of the race which has moulded all its destinies. Around this event, the plucking of an apple, are ranged, according to the strictest rules of the ancient epic, the histories of Heaven and Earth and Hell. The scene of the action is Universal Space. The time represented is Eternity. The characters are God and all his Creatures. And all these are exhibited in the clearest and most inevitable relation with the main event, so that there is not an incident, hardly a line of the poem, but leads backwards or forwards to those central lines in the Ninth Book :—

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## MILTON

So saying, her rash hand in evil hour  
Forth-reaching to the fruit, she plucked, she eat.  
Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat,  
Sighing through all her works, gave signs of woe  
That all was lost.

From this point radiates a plot so immense in  
scope, that the history of the world from the first  
teaching of the Gospel to the Millennium occupies  
only some fifty lines of Milton's epilogue. And  
the plot be vast, the stage is large enough to set  
forth. The size of Milton's theatre gives to his  
imagination those colossal scenical opportunities  
which are turned to such magnificent account.  
De Quincey enumerates some of them—("Heaven;  
opening to eject her rebellious children; the un-  
voyageable depths of ancient Chaos, with its  
'anarch old' and its eternal war of wrecks;  
these traversed by that great leading Angel that  
drew after him the third part of the heavenly host;  
earliest Paradise dawning upon the warrior-angel  
out of this far-distant 'sea without shore' of  
chaos; the dreadful phantoms of Sin and Death,  
prompted by secret sympathy and snuffing the  
distant scent of 'mortal change on earth,' chasing  
the steps of their great progenitor and sultan;  
finally the heart-freezing visions, shown and nar-  
rated to Adam, of human misery through vast  
successions of shadowy generations: all these  
scenical opportunities offered in the *Paradise Lost*

become in the hands of the mighty artist elements of undying grandeur not matched on earth.")

All these grandeurs and beauties are as real and living to-day as they were on the day when Milton conceived them. But the other advantage claimed for his epic, that it deals with matters of the dearest concern to all of us, has been sharply questioned. It was Mr. Pattison's complaint of *Paradise Lost* that in it "Milton has taken a scheme of life for life itself," and that it requires a violent effort from the modern reader to accommodate his conceptions to the anthropomorphic theology of the poem. The world is now thickly peopled with men and women who, having bestowed their patronage on other ancestors, care little about Adam and Eve, and who therefore feel that Milton's poem is wanting in the note of actuality. (Satan himself is not what he used to be; he is doubly fallen, in the esteem of his victims as well as of his Maker, and indeed

Comes to the place where he before had sat  
Among the prime in splendour, now deposed,  
Ejected, emptied, gazed, unpitied, shunned,  
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lose its power with a fickle populace? Can even a poet save him?

The drifting away of the popular belief from the tenets of Milton's theology doubtless does something to explain the lukewarm interest taken by most educated English readers in *Paradise Lost*. But it is a mistake to make much of this explanation. Certainly Milton held his own theological beliefs, as expounded in the poem, in perfect good faith and with great tenacity. But the generation after his own, which first gave him his great fame, was not seduced into admiration by any whole-hearted fellowship in belief. Dryden laments the presence in the poem of so many "machining persons,"—as he calls the supernatural characters of *Paradise Lost*. At almost the same date Dr. Thomas Burnet was causing a mild sensation in the theological world by expounding the earlier chapters of the Book of Genesis in an allegorical sense, and denying to them the significance of a literal history. Voltaire, while he praises Milton, remarks that the topic of *Paradise Lost* has afforded nothing among the French but some lively lampoons, and that those who have the highest respect for the mysteries of the Christian religion cannot forbear now and then making free with the devil, the serpent, the frailty of our first parents, and the rib that was stolen from Adam. "I have often admired," he goes on, "how barren

the subject appears, and how fruitful it grows under his hands." }

It seems likely that Milton himself, before he was fairly caught in the mesh of his own imagination, was well aware that his subject demanded something of the nature of a *tour de force*. He had to give physical, geometric embodiment to a far-reaching scheme of abstract speculation and thought,—parts of it very reluctant to such a treatment. The necessities of the epic form constrained him. When Satan, on the top of Mount Niphates, exclaims—

Which way I fly is Hell ; myself am Hell ;

when Michael promises to Adam, after his expulsion from the garden—

A Paradise within thee ; happier far ;

Milton must have known as well as any of his critics that this conception of Hell and of Paradise, if insisted on, would have shattered the fabric of his poem. His figures of Sin and Death were of his own invention, and we must not suppose him so obtuse as never to have realised the part that his shaping imagination bore in the presentment of other and greater figures in the poem. In some respects he tried rather to impose a scheme of thought and imagination upon his age than to express the ideas that he found current. His theology and his cosmical conceptions are equally tainted

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with his individual heresies. He flies in the face of the Athanasian Creed by representing the generation of the Son as an event occurring in time—"on such day as Heaven's great year brings forth." His later poem of *Paradise Regained* and the posthumous treatise of Christian Doctrine show him an Arian; in the poem the Almighty is made to speak of

This perfect man, by merit called my Son.

His account of the creation of the World as a mere ordering or re-arrangement of the wild welter of an uncreated material Chaos receives no countenance from the Fathers. In many points of theological teaching he is compelled to form definite and even visual conceptions where orthodoxy had cautiously confined itself to vague general propositions. So that the description of Sin and Death and of the causeway built by them between Hell-gates and the World, much as it has been objected to even by admirers of the poem, is only an extreme instance of the defining and hardening process that Milton found needful throughout for the concrete presentment of the high doings which are his theme. He congealed the mysteries of Time and Space, Love and Death, Sin and Forgiveness, into a material system; and in so doing, while paying the utmost deference to his authorities, he yet exercised many a choice with regard

to matters indifferent or undefinable. Thus, for instance, he borrows from the Talmud the notion that Satan first learned the existence of a prohibited tree from overhearing a conversation between Adam and Eve. He was surely conscious of what he was doing, and would have been not ill-pleased to learn that the Universe, as he conceived of it, has since been called by his name. It is Milton's Paradise Lost, lost by Milton's Adam and Eve, who are tempted by Milton's Satan, and punished by Milton's God. The stamp of his clear hard imagination is on the whole fabric ; and it is not much harder for us to coax ourselves into the belief that his is indeed the very world we inhabit than it was for the men of his own time. The senses and the intellect are older than modern science, and were employed to good effect before the invention of the spectroscope ; it is they in their daily operation that make it difficult to leap the gulf which separates the amenities and trivialities of common life from the solemn theatre of the poet's imagination. The objection that the poem has lost much of its value because we are compelled to imagine where our elders believed is of little weight in a case like this, where our lack of belief is not brought home to us until insuperable difficulties are placed in the way of our imagination. Where Milton was freest, there we follow him most gladly ; where he wrote in fetters,

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as notably in some of the scenes transacted in Heaven, our imagination, not our belief, is the first to rebel.

We are deceived by names; the more closely *Paradise Lost* is studied, the more does the hand of the author appear in every part. The epic poem, which in its natural form is a kind of cathedral for the ideas of a nation, is by him transformed into a chapel-of-ease for his own mind, a monument to his own genius and his own habits of thought. The *Paradise Lost* is like the sculptured tombs of the Medici in Florence; it is not of Night and Morning, nor of Lorenzo and Giuliano, that we think as we look at them, but solely of the great creator, Michael Angelo. The same dull convention that calls the *Paradise Lost* a religious poem might call these Christian statues. Each is primarily a great work of art; in each the traditions of two eras are blended in a unity that is indicative of nothing but the character and powers of the artist. The *Paradise Lost* is not the less an eternal monument because it is a monument to dead ideas.

We do not know exactly when Milton made his choice of subject. His Latin verses addressed to Manso, Marquis of Villa, in January 1638-9, show that Arthur and the Round Table was at that time the uppermost theme in his mind, and that the warlike achievement of heroes was the

aspect of it that most attracted him. After his return to England in 1639, it is mentioned once again in his elegy on Charles Diodati, and then we hear no more of it. In the tentative list of subjects, made in 1641, Arthur has disappeared, and the story of *Paradise Lost* already occupies the most conspicuous place, with four separate drafts suggesting different treatments of the theme.

It would be idle to speculate on what Milton might have made of the Arthur legends. One thing is certain; he would have set up the warrior king as a perfectly objective figure, hampered by no allegory, and with no inward and spiritual signification. The national cause, maintained heroically in a hundred battles, and overwhelmed at last by the brute violence of the foreign oppressor, was subject enough for him; he would never have marred his epic by sickly irresolution and the struggles of a divided will in the principal characters. Perhaps his mind reverted to his old dreams when he came to describe the pastimes wherewith the rebel angels beguile their time in Hell:—

Others, more mild,  
Retreated in a silent valley, sing  
With notes angelical to many a harp  
Their own heroic deeds, and hapless fall  
By doom of battle, and complain that Fate  
Free Virtue should enthrall to Force or Chance.  
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(What could it less when Spirits immortal sing ?)  
Suspended Hell, and took with ravishment  
The thronging audience.)

This is only one of the very numerous places in *Paradise Lost* where, before he is well aware of it, we catch Milton's sympathies dilating themselves upon the wrong side.

His researches in British annals, begun at the time when he was still in quest of a theme, convinced him that the whole story of Arthur was "obscured and blemished with fables." He foraged among other British subjects, feeling that the great poem which was designed to raise England to the literary peerage and set her by the side of countries of older fame must deal with a theme of truly national import. Some of the subjects that he jotted down were obviously of too incidental and trivial a nature for his purpose, and a wise instinct confined him to the earlier history of the island, where his own freedom of treatment was less likely to be hampered by an excess of detail. And then, precisely how or when we do not know, the idea came to him that he would treat a subject still larger and of a more tremendous import,—the fortunes, not of the nation, but of the race:—

With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

The attractions that this theme, once hit on,

exercised on Milton's mind may easily be guessed. In the first place, it was a sacred subject : an opportunity for leading poetry back to its divine allegiance ; and, by the creation of a new species of epic, an escape from a danger which must have been very present to his mind—the danger of too close an imitation of the ancients. (More specific reasons concurred in recommending it. In the Garden of Eden he might present to an age which was overrun with a corrupt religion and governed by a decadent court the picture of a religion without a church, of life in its primitive simplicity, and of patriarchal worship without the noisome accretions of later ceremonial.) His attitude to the Laudian movement is eloquently expressed, at this same time, in the treatise *Of Reformation in England*, where he describes how the religious teachers of his own and preceding ages “began to draw down all the divine intercourse betwixt God and the soul, yea, the very shape of God himself into an exterior and bodily form, urgently pretending a necessity and obligation of joining the body in a formal reverence and worship circumscribed ; they hallowed it, they fumed it, they sprinkled it, they bedecked it, not in robes of pure innocency, but of pure linen, with other deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, gold, and gewgaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamen's vestry : then was

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The thronging audience.)

This is only one of the very numerous places in *Paradise Lost* where, before he is well aware of it, we catch Milton's sympathies dilating themselves upon the wrong side.

His researches in British annals, begun at the time when he was still in quest of a theme, convinced him that the whole story of Arthur was "obscured and blemished with fables." He foraged among other British subjects, feeling that the great poem which was designed to raise England to the literary peerage and set her by the side of countries of older fame must deal with a theme of truly national import. Some of the subjects that he jotted down were obviously of too incidental and trivial a nature for his purpose, and a wise instinct confined him to the earlier history of the island, where his own freedom of treatment was less likely to be hampered by an excess of detail. And then, precisely how or when we do not know, the idea came to him that he would treat a subject still larger and of a more tremendous import,—the fortunes, not of the nation, but of the race:—

With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat.

The attractions that this theme, once hit on,

exercised on Milton's mind may easily be guessed. In the first place, it was a sacred subject : an opportunity for leading poetry back to its divine allegiance ; and, by the creation of a new species of epic, an escape from a danger which must have been very present to his mind—the danger of too close an imitation of the ancients. (More specific reasons concurred in recommending it. In the Garden of Eden he might present to an age which was overrun with a corrupt religion and governed by a decadent court the picture of a religion without a church, of life in its primitive simplicity, and of patriarchal worship without the noisome accretions of later ceremonial.) His attitude to the Laudian movement is eloquently expressed, at this same time, in the treatise *Of Reformation in England*, where he describes how the religious teachers of his own and preceding ages “began to draw down all the divine intercourse betwixt God and the soul, yea, the very shape of God himself into an exterior and bodily form, urgently pretending a necessity and obligation of joining the body in a formal reverence and worship circumscribed ; they hallowed it, they fumed it, they sprinkled it, they bedecked it, not in robes of pure innocence, but of pure linen, with other deformed and fantastic dresses, in palls and mitres, gold, and gewgaws fetched from Aaron's old wardrobe or the flamen's vestry : then was

priest set to con his motions and his postures, his liturgies and his hurries, till the soul by this means of over-bodying herself, given up justly to fleshly delights, hated her wing apace downward : and finding the ease she had from her visible and sensuous colleague, the body, in performance of religious duties, her pinions now broken and flagging, shifted off from herself the labour of high soaring any more, forgot her heavenly flight, and left the dull and droiling carcase to plod on in the old road and drudging trade of outward conformity."

(But Adam and Eve, Milton is careful to explain, were not ritualists. They recite their evening hymn of praise as they stand at the entrance to their shady lodge :—

This said unanimous, and other rites  
Observing none, but adoration pure  
Which God likes best, into their inmost bower  
Handed they went.

(The traits of Milton's Puritanism peep out at unexpected places in the poem. The happy Garden Adam is told, will be destroyed after the Flood for a reason that would have been approved the image-breakers of the Commonwealth :—

To teach thee that God attributes to place  
No sanctity, if none be thither brought  
By men who there frequent, or therein dwell.

The palace of Pandemonium is built by Satan's host in an hour, whence men may

Learn how their greatest monuments of fame,  
And strength, and art, are easily outdone  
By spirits reprobate ;

—a perfectly sound moral, well illustrating Mr. Swinburne's remark that Puritanism has nothing to do with Art, and that the great Puritans and the great artists have never confused them.)

(Milton must also have been drawn to the theme of *Paradise Lost* by the scope it promised for scenes of quiet natural beauty :—

All that bowery loneliness,  
'The brooks of Eden mazily murmuring  
And bloom profuse and cedar arches.)

{ His imagination was so susceptible to a touch of beauty) that even in the bare sketch he has left for a drama dealing with the story of Lot and his escape from Sodom we see how likely he was, here also, to fall into the error of *Comus*. As Lot entertains the angels at supper, "the Gallantry of the town passe by in Procession, with musick and song, to the temple of Venus Urania." The opening Chorus is to relate the course of the city, "each evening every one with mistresse, or Ganymed, gitterning along the streets, or solacing on the banks of Jordan, or down the stream." But in the story of the Garden of Eden the beauty was,

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er once, on the side of the morality; innocence and purity might be depicted, not, as in a fallen world, clad in complete steel, but at ease in their native haunts, surrounded by all the inexhaustible bounty of an unsubdued and uncorrupted Nature.)

The chief dramatic interest of the poem, however, comes in with the great outcast angel, stirred up by his passions of envy and revenge to assault the new-created inhabitants of the Garden. It seems likely that Milton was drawn to this part of his theme by chains of interest and sympathy stronger than he confessed or knew. He was an epic poet, striving to describe great events worthily, but the dramatic situation betrayed him. He knew only that he could draw a rebel leader, noble in bearing, superbly outlined, a worthy adversary of the Most High. But it happened to him, as it has happened to others who have found themselves in a position where Satan could do them a service; before long, as if by some mediæval compact, the relations are reversed, and the poet is in the service of the Devil. He can hardly have foreseen this chance; although there are not wanting signs in the poem itself that, before it was half completed, he became uneasily conscious of what was happening, and attempted, too late, to remedy it. When he chose his subject he doubtless intended that the centre of interest should be fixed in the Garden of Eden, and did not perceive how of necessity it

must tend to sink lower, to that realm in the shadow of darkness, innumerable more populous, inhabited by beings of a nobler origin, of greater (and more human) passions, with a longer and more distinguished history, and with this further claim upon the sympathy of the reader, that they are doomed to an eternity of suffering.

It is worth our while as critics to try to put ourselves in Milton's place at the time when he had made his choice, that we may realise not only the attractions but also the difficulties of the theme. An Italian poet of the early seventeenth century, Giovanni Battista Andreini, from whose drama, entitled *Adamo*, Milton is alleged to have borrowed some trifles, has made a very full and satisfactory statement of these difficulties in the preface to his play. He mentions, for instance, the unpromising monotony of Adam's life during the time spent in the earthly paradise, and the difficulty of giving verisimilitude to the conversation between the woman and the snake. But he waxes most eloquent on the last and greatest difficulty—"since the composition must remain deprived of those poetic ornaments so dear to the Muses; deprived of the power to draw comparisons from implements of art introduced in the course of years, since in the time of the first man there was no such thing; deprived also of naming (at least while Adam speaks or discourse is held with him), for example,

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ows, arrows, hatchets, urns, knives, swords, spears, rumpets, drums, trophies, banners, lists, hammers, torches, bellows, funeral piles, theatres, exchequers, infinite things of a like nature, introduced by the necessities of sin; . . . deprived moreover of introducing points of history, sacred or profane, of relating fictions of fabulous deities, of rehearsing loves, furies, sports of hunting or fishing, triumphs, shipwrecks, conflagrations, enchantments, and things of a like nature, that are in truth the ornament and the soul of poetry."

All these difficulties for Andreini's drama were difficulties also for Milton's poem. (Yet no reader of *Paradise Lost* is found to complain that the poem is lacking in poetic ornament.) Milton has successfully surmounted or evaded many of this formidable catalogue of limitations, without the sacrifice of dramatic propriety. (It is true that in the course of their morning orisons, addressed to their Maker, Adam and Eve apostrophise the Mists and Exhalations—

that now rise  
From hill or steaming lake, dusky or gray,  
Till the sun paint your fleecy skirts with gold;)

—where, a purist might urge, neither of them had any right to be acquainted with paint, or skirts, or gold.) But anachronisms like these are, after all, only a part of the great anachronism, or postulate rather, whereby Adam and Eve are made to speak

the English tongue. In the Twelfth Book Michael is guilty of a graver lapse where he mentions baptism without explanation or apology. On the other hand, Raphael, who had a pleasanter occasion and more time for his retrospective summary, explains the military manœuvring of angels by what Adam had already seen of the flight of birds, and after describing the great war in Heaven and the fierce hosting of the opposed forces, ventures, at a later point in his story, to illustrate the flowing together of the congregated waters at the Creation by a simile drawn, with apology, from the massing of troops :—

As armies at the call  
Of trumpet (for of armies thou hast heard)  
Troop to their standard, so the watery throng,  
Wave rolling after wave.

In the main Milton studies propriety with regard to the forbidden matters enumerated by Andreini. But he escapes from the full effect of the prohibition by a variety of devices. In the first place, there are the two chief episodes of the poem ; Raphael's narration, from the Fifth to the Eighth Book, imparted to Adam as a warning against impending dangers, and conveying an account of the history of the Universe before the Creation of Man ; and Michael's narration, in the Eleventh and Twelfth Books, consoling and strengthening Adam, before the Expulsion from

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the Garden, by a rapid survey of the prospective history of the World from that event down to the Millennium. Considered as a narrator, Michael is very subject to dullness; were it not for the un-failing dignity and magniloquence of his diction, his tale would be merely a bleak compendium of the outlines of Scripture history; but to Raphael is committed the story of the war in Heaven and its amazing sequel,—a story containing passages so brilliant, and so little necessary to be narrated at length, that there is some flavour of inconsistency in Milton's apology for his theme, prefixed to the Ninth Book, where he describes himself as—

Not sedulous by nature to indite  
 Wars, hitherto the only argument  
 Heroic deemed, chief mastery to dissect  
 With long and tedious havoc fabled knights  
 In battles feigned (the better fortitude  
 Of patience and heroic martyrdom  
 Unsung), or to describe races and games  
 Or tilting furniture, emblazoned shields,  
 Impresses quaint, caparisons and steeds,  
 Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights  
 At joust and tournament; then marshalled feast  
 Served up in hall with sewers and seneschals:  
 The skill of artifice and office mean;  
 Not that which justly gives heroic name  
 To person or to poem! Me, of these  
 Nor skilled nor studious, higher argument  
 Remains, sufficient of itself to raise  
 That name, unless an age too late, or cold  
 Climate, or years, damp my intended wing

Depressed ; and much they may if all be mine,  
Not hers who brings it nightly to my ear.

To depreciate war as a subject for the heroic Muse was ungrateful in Milton, who had devoted the whole of his Sixth Book to a description of the "wild work in Heaven" caused by the great rebellion, and had indulged his imagination with some most extravagant fantasies ; such as the digging in the soil of Heaven for sulphur and nitre (where the soil of Hell, it may be remarked, yielded gold to the miner), the invention of artillery, and the use of mountains as missiles,

Hurled to and fro with jaculation dire.

He had, moreover, attained to the height of the sublime in that terrific closing scene where the Son, riding forth in single majesty, drives the rebel host over the crystal bounds of Heaven into the waste-ful abyss. Wars, in short, hold a conspicuous place in the poem, — conflicts and broils so enormous that—

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To this uproar.

(Races and athletic sports are among the melancholy diversions of the dwellers in Hell during their forced leisure. Even tilts and tournaments are not absent from *Paradise Lost*, but they are

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introduced by the second of the devices, which enable Milton to extend the scope of his poem; the free and frequent use, namely, of illustrative and decorative comparisons. Thus the spacious hall of Pandemonium is compared to—

A covered field, where champions bold  
Wont ride in armed, and at the Soldan's chair  
Defied the best of Panim chivalry  
To mortal combat, or career with lance. )

(It is plain that although almost all of the characters of the poem are precluded from making allusion to the events of human history, the poet himself is free; and he uses his freedom throughout. (Most of the passages that have gained for Milton the name of a learned poet are introduced by way of simile. At times he employs the simplest epic figure, drawn from the habits of rustic or animal life. But his favourite figure is the "long-tailed simile," or, as it is better called, the decorative comparison, used for its ennobling, rather than for its elucidating virtue. Here he parts company with Homer, and even with Virgil, who could draw on no such vast and various store of history, geography, and romance. From Herodotus, Olaus Magnus, and onward to the latest discoveries in geography and astronomy, the researches of Galileo, and the descriptions given by contemporary travellers of China and the Chinese, or of

North American Indians, Milton compels the authors he had read, both ancient and modern, to contribute to the gracing of his work.) It is partly this wealth of implicit lore, still more, perhaps, the subtly reminiscent character of much of his diction, that justifies Mr. Pattison in the remark that "an appreciation of Milton is the last reward of consummated scholarship."

A third device, not the least remarkable of those by which he gives elasticity to his theme, is to be found in the tradition that he adopts with regard to the later history of the fallen angels. A misunderstanding of four verses in the fourteenth chapter of Isaiah, and some cryptic allusions in the Book of Revelations are the chief Scriptural authorities for the Miltonic account of the Fall of the Angels, which is not borrowed from the Fathers, but corresponds rather with the later version popularised in England by the cycles of Miracle Plays. According to the *Divine Institutes* of Lactantius, the nameless Angel, to whom from the first had been given power over the new-created Earth, was alone infected with envy of the Son of God, his elder and superior, and set himself to vitiate and destroy mankind in the cradle. He tempted Eve, and she fell; after the expulsion from Paradise he set himself also to corrupt the guardian angels who were sent down from Heaven for the protection and education of the increasing

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race of men. In this attempt also he succeeded ; "the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair, and they took them wives of all which they chose." And they forgot their heavenly estate, and made for themselves a Godless dominion upon Earth. This is the Fall of the Angels as it is narrated at greater length in the recently recovered apocryphal *Book of Enoch*, and alluded to, perhaps in the Epistles of Peter and of Jude, where are mentioned "the angels that sinned," and "the angels which kept not their first estate." Milton's version brings these angels to the earth, not as protectors of mankind, but as conquerors come from Hell, to possess and occupy the spacious world delivered over to them by the victory of Satan. From that point forward, however, he adopts the tradition whereby Jerome, Lactantius, and others had identified the fallen angels with the gods of the heathen. Whether as conquerors or as corrupted guardians of the human race, they seek the same ends,—to divert worship from the true God, and by the destruction of man, to contrive a solace for their own perdition. They are the inventors of astrology, sooth-saying, divination, necromancy, and black magic ; they were once the ministers of God, and still have a presentiment of his acts, so that they can sometimes speak truly of the future by means of oracles and magicians, claiming the while the credit of bringing

that to pass which in fact they only foresaw. Milton, in adopting this doctrine, merely followed current belief, and did not, as De Quincey seems to think, hit upon it by a fortunate stroke of genius. He might have found it incidentally but fully set forth in so recent a book as Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I. iv. "The fall of the angels, therefore," says Hooker, "was pride. Since their fall, their practices have been the clean contrary unto those just mentioned. For, being dispersed, some in the air, some in the earth, some in the water, some among the minerals, dens, and caves that are under the earth; they have by 'all means laboured to effect a universal rebellion against the laws, and as far as in them lieth utter destruction of the works of God. These wicked spirits the heathen honoured instead of Gods, both generally under the name of *dis inferi*, 'gods infernal,' and particularly, some in oracles, some in idols, some as household gods, some as nymphs; in a word, no foul or wicked spirit which was not one way or other honoured of men as god, till such time as light appeared in the world, and dissolved the works of the Devil." The argument which Milton himself sets forth for the support of this view was accepted as conclusive in his own age. The Ionian gods, he says, Titan, and Saturn, and Jove, and the rest, the youngest branch of that evil and influential family, were—

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## MILTON

Held

Gods, yet confessed later than Heaven and Earth  
 Their boasted parents.

They ruled the middle air and had access to no higher or purer heaven. Howsoever Milton came by the doctrine, it was of enormous use to him; it gave him names for his devils, and characters, and a detailed history of the part they had played in human affairs; it was, in short, a key to all the mythologies.

By these devices the author of *Paradise Lost* escapes the impoverishment of imagination that his subject seemed to impose upon him. (On looking once more over Andreini's list of prohibited topics, we are surprised to find how many of them Milton has found a place for. He does introduce points of history, sacred and profane; he relates fictions of fabulous deities; he rehearses loves, furies, triumphs, conflagrations, and things of a like nature. The principal conflagration that he describes is on a very large scale; and the majestic ascent of the Son—

Up to the Heaven of Heavens, his high abode,

Followed with acclamation, and the sound  
 Symphonious of ten thousand harps, that tuned  
 Angelic harmonies,

is the grandest triumphal procession in all literature  
 On the other hand, he manages to dispense with

some of the institutions and implements "introduced by the necessities of sin." (He has swords and spears, trumpets and drums in plenty. But he has no knives, nor hatchets, nor bellows; and no theatres nor exchequers.) There are no urns nor funeral piles, because there is no death; or rather, because the only Death that there is increases the number of persons in the poem by one. Sports of hunting and fishing there are, of course, none; and, although it is an heroic poem, the horse takes little part in the celestial war, is hardly known in hell, and is unheard of on earth until Adam beholds in vision the armed concourse of his corrupt descendants. (Nevertheless, the general impression left by the poem is one of richness rather than poverty of poetic ornament.) (The wealth is most profusely displayed in the books treating of Satan and his followers, but it is not absent from Eden nor from the empyreal Heaven,) although in the one case the monotony of the situation, and in the other the poet's evident anxiety to authorise his every step from Scripture, prevent the full display of his power. (But Milton is a difficult poet to disable; he is often seen at his best on the tritest theme, which he handles after his own grave fashion by comprehensive statement, measured and appropriate, heightened by none save the most obvious metaphors, depending for almost all its charm on the

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colouring of the inevitable epithet, and the solemn music of the cadence :—

Now came still Evening on, and Twilight gray  
Had in her sober livery all things clad ;  
Silence accompanied ; for beast and bird  
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests,  
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale,  
She all night long her amorous descant sung :  
Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament  
With living sapphires ; Hesperus, that led  
The starry host, rode brightest, till the Moon,  
Rising in clouded majesty, at length  
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,  
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.

✓ Darkness, silence, rest, the nightingale's song, the stars, the rising of the moon—these are all the material of this wonderful passage. Yet did ever such beauty fall with night upon such peace, save in Paradise alone? )

Once he had got his story, based on his few authorities, with hints unconsciously taken and touches added, perhaps, from his reading of other poets—of Cædmon, Andreini, and Vondel, Spenser, Sylvester, Crashaw, and the Fletchers Milton's first task was to reduce it to the strict relations of time and space. His blindness probably helped him by relieving him from hourly solicitations of the visible world, and giving him a dark and vacant space in which to rear a geometric fabric. Against this background

figures of his characters are outlined in shapes of light, and in this vacancy he mapped out his local Heaven and Hell.

Heaven, as Milton portrays it, is a plain of vast extent, diversified with hills, valleys, woods and streams. In the Second Book he speaks of it as—

Extended wide  
In circuit, undetermined square or round;

in the Tenth Book it is determined, and is square. It is bounded by battlements of living sapphire, and towers of opal. In the midst is situated a Mount, the dwelling place of the Most High, surrounded by golden lamps, which diffuse night and day alternately—for without twilight and dawn, his dearest memories, Heaven would have been no Heaven to Milton. On a mountain far to the north of this great plain, Satan erects his pyramids and towers of diamond and gold, and establishes his empire, which lasts exactly three days. At his final overthrow the crystal wall of Heaven rolls back, disclosing a gap into the abyss; the rebels, tortured with plagues and thunder, fling themselves in desperation over the verge. They fall for nine days, through Chaos. Chaos is the realm of a king of the same name, who reigns over it with his consort Night. It is of immeasurable extent, quite dark, and turbulent with the raw material of the Cosmos. Just as Milton, for the

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purposes of his poem, followed the older astronomy, and gave to it a new lease of life in the popular imagination, so also he abides by the older physics. The orderly created World, or Cosmos, is conceived as compounded of four elements, Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. None of these four is to be found in Chaos, for each of them is composed of the simpler atoms of Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, symmetrically arranged in pairs. Thus Air is Hot and Moist, Fire is Hot and Dry, Water is Cold and Moist, Earth is Cold and Dry. Before they are separated and blended by Divine command, the four rudimentary constituents of creation are crowded in repulsive contiguity; they bubble and welter, fight and jostle in the dark, with hideous noises. In its upper strata Chaos is calmer, and is faintly lighted by the effulgence from the partially transparent walls of Heaven.

Below is Hell, newly prepared for the rebels. Like Heaven it is a vast plain; a bituminous lake, played over by livid flames, is one of its principal features; and hard by stands a volcanic mountain at the foot of which the devils build their palace and hold their assembly. The nine-fold gates of Hell, far distant, are guarded by Sin and Death, the paramour and the son of Satan. No one has plausibly explained how they came by their office. It was intended to be a perfect sinecure; there was no one to be let in and no one to be let out. T

single occasion that presented itself for a neglect of their duty was by them eagerly seized.

During the nine days while the rebels lay on the burning lake, drowsed by its fumes, the World was created. It consists, according to the astronomy followed by Milton, of ten concentric spheres fitted, like Chinese boxes, one within another, and the Earth in the centre. Nine of these are transparent, the spheres, that is to say, of the seven planets (the Sun and the Moon being reckoned as planets), the sphere of the fixed stars, and the crystalline sphere. The outermost sphere, or *primum mobile*, is opaque and impervious. The whole orbicular World hangs by a golden chain from that part of the battlements of Heaven whence the angels fell. It is connected with Heaven by richly jewelled stairs, to be let down or taken up at pleasure, and can be entered only through an orifice or passage at the top. Between the foot of the stairs and the entrance to the World is a sea or lake of jasper and liquid pearl.

All the interest and meaning of the World is centred in one favoured spot of Earth. Eden is a district of Mesopotamia, and the happy garden, called Paradise, is situated in the east of Eden. It is a raised table-land, surrounded on all sides by a high ridge of hill, thickly wooded, and impenetrable. Its single gate, hewn out of a rock of alabaster, faces eastward, and is accessible only

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by a pass leading up from the plain and overhung by craggy cliffs. Through Eden runs a river which passes by a tunnel under Paradise, and, rising through the porous earth, waters the garden with springs. It was by this underground passage that Satan entered the garden a second time, when, having been discovered by Ithuriel, and expelled by Gabriel, he had circled the Earth seven times, keeping on the shady side to avoid the gaze of Uriel, and at the end of the week had resolved on another attempt.

The Fall of Man wrought some few changes in the physical configuration of the Universe. Sin and Death built the mighty causeway that connects the orifice of the World with Hell-gates. Provision had to be made under the new dispensation for the peopling of the whole surface of the Earth; so the axis was turned askew, and the beginning ordained of extremes of cold and heat, of storms and droughts, and noxious planetary influences. Night and day were known to man in his sinless state, but the seasons date from his transgression.

(1) The time-scheme of the poem is less carefully defined; indeed, it is not certain that Milton intended accurately to define it. The recurrence of the numbers three and nine, numbers traditionally honoured by poetry, throws suspicion on the efforts of the exact commentators. Even in his statements with regard to spatial relations the poet

was not always minutely consistent with himself. The distance from the plain of Heaven to the plain of Hell is said in the First Book to be three times the radius of the World, or, in his own words, the prison of Hell is

As far removed from God and light of Heaven  
As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.

The great globe, therefore, that hangs from the floor of Heaven reaches two-thirds of the way down to Hell. Yet in the Second Book Satan, after a long and perilous journey from Hell, comes in view of

This pendent World, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude close by the moon.

So small is the World, compared with the wide extent of the empyreal Heaven. But it is not easy to conceive how, in the limited space between Heaven and Hell, the World could so appear to Satan.

A like curious consideration of the passages where time is mentioned reveals a gap in the tale of days enumerated by Milton. We are not told how long it took Satan to reach the Earth. Driven back on precedents and analogies we find them conflicting. The outcast angels took nine days to fall the same distance. But falling, as Moloch points out in his speech at the Infernal Council, was to them less natural than rising; and Raphael,

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he finds employment for only four, Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and Uriel, with a few Seraphim and Cherubim, to whom he invariably, and very improperly, assigns a subordinate position.

His angels fight and play games, as they were doing at the gate of Paradise on the evening when Satan first appeared there. They wear solid armour, and so fall a ready prey to the artillery of their foes—

Unarmed they might  
Have easily, as spirits, evaded swift  
By quick contraction or remove ; but now  
Foul dissipation followed, and forced rout.

They eat and drink and digest ; they even—and here, though we be armed with triple brass, we cannot avoid a sense of shock—they even blush when an indiscreet question is asked of them. When Raphael colours at the inquisitive demands of Adam, it gives a melancholy force to his earlier suggestion—

What if Earth  
Be but the shadow of Heaven, and things therein  
Each to other like more than on Earth is thought ?

This is the scheme of things, and these are the actors, that Milton sets in motion. We shall do well to accept the limitations he assigns, and to look in his poem only for what is to be found there. It would be a wearisome and fruitless quest to journey through the *Paradise Lost* in search of



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those profound touches of humanity, and those sudden felicities of insight, which abound in the Elizabethans. Subtleties of thought, fine observation of truths that almost evade the attempt to express them, sentences and figures illuminative of the mysteries of human destiny and the intricacies of human character—of all these there is none. If an author's works are to be used as a treasury or garner of wise and striking sayings, the harvest of sensibility and experience, *Paradise Lost* will yield only a poor handful of gleanings. One such reflection, enforced by a happy figure, occurs in the Third Book, where Satan, disguised as a youthful Cherub, deceives the Archangel Uriel—

So spake the false dissembler unperceived ;  
For neither man nor angel can discern  
Hypocrisy—the only evil that walks  
Invisible, except to God alone,  
By His permissive will, through Heaven and Earth ;  
And oft, though Wisdom wake, Suspicion sleeps  
At Wisdom's gate, and to Simplicity  
Resigns her charge, while Goodness thinks no ill  
Where no ill seems.

Milton plainly had known hypocrisy, and had been deceived by it. But it would be difficult to match this reflection with any single other passage in the whole poem. To say that such reflections are common in Shakespeare would be too moderate a statement ; they are the very air he breathes

And even in the lesser dramatists the happy embodiment of observation in a telling figure is to be found on every page. An acute criticism, for instance, is condensed in a dramatic form by Ford, where he describes what may be called low politeness—

Smooth formality  
Is usher to the rankness of the blood,  
But impudence bears up the train.

The peculiar combination of formality and impudence that marks ill-breeding was never more happily described than in this figure; the mock solemnity of the usher comes first, and is soon followed by the grimacing antics of the page, while each in his own way implies that the advances of courtesy are a pomp and a deceit. Metaphors of the same kind abound in the work of more modern analytic poets. Here is another parable of a door-keeper, more poetic than Milton's:—

They say that Pity in Love's service dwells,  
A porter at the rosy temple's gate.  
I missed him going; but it is my fate  
To come upon him now beside his wells;  
Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,  
And that the purple doors have closed behind.

In Milton's poetry we find ourselves in a remote atmosphere; far indeed from the shrewd observation of daily life, farther even from that wonderful analysis of emotion which is the pastime

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Milton plainly had known hypocrisy, and had been deceived by it. But it would be difficult to match this reflection with any single other passage in the whole poem. To say that such reflections are common in Shakespeare would be too moderate a statement ; they are the very air he breathes.

And even in the lesser dramatists the happy embodiment of observation in a telling figure is to be found on every page. An acute criticism, for instance, is condensed in a dramatic form by Ford, where he describes what may be called low politeness—

Smooth formality  
Is usher to the rankness of the blood,  
But impudence bears up the train.

The peculiar combination of formality and impudence that marks ill-breeding was never more happily described than in this figure; the mock solemnity of the usher comes first, and is soon followed by the grimacing antics of the page, while each in his own way implies that the advances of courtesy are a pomp and a deceit. Metaphors of the same kind abound in the work of more modern analytic poets. Here is another parable of a door-keeper, more poetic than Milton's:—

They say that Pity in Love's service dwells,  
A porter at the rosy temple's gate.  
I missed him going; but it is my fate  
To come upon him now beside his wells,  
Whereby I know that I Love's temple leave,  
And that the purp'le doors have closed behind.

In Milton's poetry we find ourselves in a remote atmosphere; far indeed from the shrewd observation of daily life, farther even from that wonderful analysis of emotion which is the poet's time



of Shakespeare and of Meredith. Beautiful figured writing and keen psychological observation of this kind are beside the purpose of Milton, and beyond his power.

For the time we must forego the attempt to see into the life of things, and must accept in imagination our position as citizens in this strange majestic commonwealth of angels and men. It is no mean city. Noble shapes pass before our eyes. High language is held, and great wars are waged. Events of tremendous import roll on to their destined accomplishment. Golden processions move across the dim expanse of Chaos. Worlds are blown and broken like bubbles. There is concerted song, feasting, and gratulation; dire plots are hatched and blaze forth into light; will clashes with will; Heaven opens, and a torrent of flaming ruin is poured forth into the deep. The Victor, ensconced in his omnipotence, is fiercely triumphant; and in the dark below there is the dull gleam of unconquered pride, deadly courage and immortal despair. But in the midst of all this vast rivalry of interests and jar of opposed systems, a cry is heard, like that muffled cry which caught Macbeth's ear as he nerved himself for his last fight. It is the cry of the human soul, left homeless and derelict in a universe where she is the only alien. For her the amaranth of the empyrean Heaven is as comfortless as the adamant of Hell.

She has lost her Paradise even while Adam's was building—the Paradise where the flowers fade, and loves and hates are mortal.

In the poem itself signs are not wanting that Milton felt the terrible strain imposed upon him by the intense and prolonged abstraction of his theme—its unreality and superhuman elevation. Some of the comparisons that he chooses to illustrate scenes in Hell are taken from the incidents of simple rustic life, and by their contrast with the lurid creatures of his imagination come like a draught of cold water to a traveller in a tropical waste of sand and thorns. It is almost as if the poet himself were oppressed by the suffocation of the atmosphere that he has created, and, gasping for breath, sought relief by summoning up to remembrance the sweet security of pastoral life. So, when the devils are shrunk to enter Pandemonium, they are compared to

Faery elves

Whose midnight revels, by a forest-side  
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,  
Or dreams he sees, while overhead the Moon  
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the Earth  
Wheels her pale course.

The rejoicings, again, at the end of the infernal consultation, are described in a figure that makes a like impression, and brings the same momentary relief—

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As, when from mountain-tops the dusky clouds  
 Ascending, while the North-wind sleeps, o'erspread  
 Heaven's cheerful face, the louring element  
 Scowls o'er the darkened landskip snow or shower,  
 If chance the radiant sun, with farewell sweet,  
 Extend his evening beam, the fields revive,  
 The birds their notes renew, and bleating herds  
 Attest their joy, that hill and valley rings.

The splendid artifice of contrast, noted by De Quincey as one of the subtlest of Milton's devices, is illustrated, perhaps, by both these passages. De Quincey instances neither, but chooses, as examples of the way in which two images may act and react, heightening each other by contrast—first, the use of architectural terms in describing Paradise; next, the exhibition of a banquet in the desert in *Paradise Regained*—“stimulating the sense of its utter solitude and remotion from men and cities”; and, last and best, the comparison of Satan, in the same poem, to an old man gathering sticks upon a winter's day. “The household image of old age, of human infirmity, and of domestic hearths, are all meant as a machinery for provoking and soliciting the fearful idea to which they are placed in collision, and as so many repelling poles.”

This is clever criticism and true philosophy. But the chief effect from the more elaborate figures of this kind is to be found merely in the reprieve and refreshment that they bring. Ther

is a sense of pathos, almost of tears, in being allowed, for one moment only, to taste reality again, to revisit familiar scenes, before we are once more bound on the slow wheel of unnatural events that is urged forward by the poet. Nothing in Eden comes home to the feelings more directly than the simile used to describe Satan as he watches Eve on the morning of the temptation—

As one who, long in populous city pent,  
Where houses thick and sewers annoy the air,  
Forth issuing on a summer's morn, to breathe  
Among the pleasant villages and farms  
Adorned, from each thing met conceives delight—  
The smell of grain, or tilded grain, or kine,  
Or dairy, each rural sight, each rural sound—  
If chance with nymph-like step fair virgin pass,  
What pleasing seemed for her now pleases more,  
She most, and in her look sums all delights:  
Such pleasure took the Serpent to behold  
This flowery plot, the sweet recess of Eve.

The Serpent is glad to escape from Hell, to breathe the morning air of Eden. But how glad we are to escape from Eden

To breathe  
Among the pleasant villages and farms!

There are no villages and farms in Eden, no smell of hay, no sheaves of corn, no cottages, no roads, and no trace of that most human of symbols, the thin blue scarf of smoke rising from

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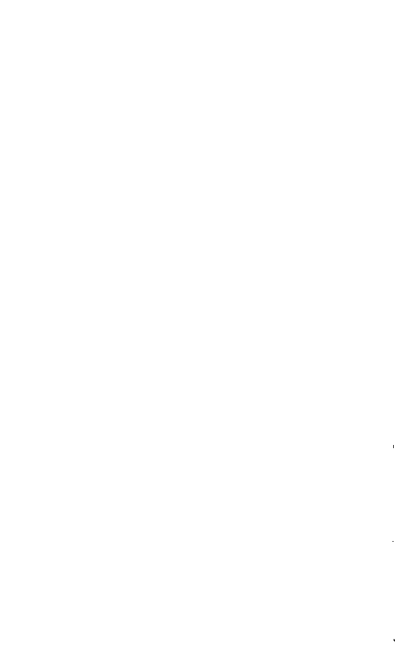


wayside encampment. Even when we are privileged to assist at the first festal celebration of hospitality on Earth, the dinner given to the Angel, for which Eve gathers

Fruit of all kinds, in coat  
Rough or smooth rined, or bearded husk, or shell,

and heaps them, with bountiful hand, on the table of raised turf, we are not perfectly at ease with our hosts. Not all the dignity of Adam, nor all the beauty of Eve, can make us forget that they are nut-eaters, that they have not the art of cooking, and do not ferment the juice of the grape. A short stay in Eden teaches us the sad truth that we are dependent, not only for the pleasures of our life, but even for many of the dearest pleasures of our imagination, on the devices "introduced by the necessities of sin." We cannot settle down in the midst of this "enormous bliss"; we wander through the place, open-mouthed with wonder, like country visitors admiring the Crown jewels, and then—we long to be at home.

There are no children in any of Milton's poems. The introduction, in *Paradise Lost*, of real human child, such as Shakespeare brings into *Coriolanus* or *Macbeth*, would be like the bringing of a spark of fire into a powder magazine. Not of these edifying speeches could be made in t



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## MILTON

marvel, seeing that it is spanned on frail arches over the abyss of the impossible, the unnatural, and the grotesque. Let it be granted that, in its main features, the system of *Paradise Lost* does correspond with what was and is the religious creed of not a few people. There is many a religious creed, strongly held, which is convincing enough until the imagination begins to work it out in detail, to try to realise it, in a clear light, as a connected whole. Then either the imagination or the creed must give way. The remarkable thing about Milton's achievement is that *Paradise Lost* is both a creed and a cosmical scheme of imagination, and that, except here and there, it is impossible to point to parts of the poem and say, "Here he ceased to believe," or "Here he gave up the effort to imagine." He both imagined and believed throughout; he projected himself, like a sleep-walker, into the mammoth caves of his antediluvian dreams, and lived among his own radiant and shadowy creations. We need not, therefore, be surprised to find that, in the first place, his daughters ran wild and neither liked nor understood their father; and that, in the second place, for the rendering of thought he invented a system of preternatural majestic diction, perfectly fitted for the utterance of his own conceptions, but, when divorced from those conceptions, so monstrously artificial.

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## CHAPTER IV

### PARADISE LOST : THE ACTORS. THE LATE POEMS

THE difficulties which Milton felt and conquered in the making of his epic masterpiece had their origin, for the most part, in the intractable and barren nature of his chosen theme. The dangers that beset him, and sometimes tripped his feet, arose, on the other hand, from his own declared intention in the handling of that theme:—

That, to the highth of this great argument,  
I may assert Eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to men.

The pursuit of this argumentative end led him through strange passes. A less courageous or a more sensitive man might well have hesitated at the entrance. But Milton hesitated at nothing. The ultimate mysteries of human existence and Divine government were no mysteries to him.

The living Throne, the sapphire blaze,  
Where angels tremble, while they gaze,  
He saw ;

—and he did not tremble. His persons are visible, their characters are known, the nature of their relations is easily ascertained and expounded. Everything, in short, is as plain as a pikestaff. So he came to picture scenes which criticism is reluctant to traverse, and to make statements which it is equally irreverent either to affirm or to deny.

Dr. Johnson, with a fearful and sincere piety, refused to follow Milton into Heaven. "Of the agents in the poem," he says, "the chief are such as it is irreverence to name on slight occasions." And again:—"The characters in the *Paradise Lost* which admit of examination are those of angels and of man." It is impossible not to respect Johnson's attitude, but later critics have found it difficult to follow his example, and Milton himself would have been the last to claim sanctuary in Heaven for the imaginations on which the whole fabric of the poem depends.

Coleridge is one of the very few critics who have praised the conduct of the celestial part of the story:—"Wherever God is represented as acting directly as Creator, without any exhibition of his own essence, Milton adopts the simplest and sternest language of the Scriptures. . . . But, as some personal interest was demanded for the purposes of poetry, Milton takes advantage of the dramatic representation of God's action as if

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Not that they durst without his leave attempt;  
 But us he sends upon his high behests  
 For state, as sovran King, and to inure  
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The particular event with which, according to  
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 a crudity that would have horrified the Fathers.  
 The appointment of a Vicegerent to the Almighty,  
 and the edict requiring homage to be done to him,  
 are announced "on a day" to the host of Angels  
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 Archangels, thereafter called Satan, draws off his  
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 speech to the Son:—

Let us advise, and to this hazard draw  
 With speed what force is left, and all employ  
 In our defence, lest unawares we lose  
 This our high place, our sanctuary, our hill.

It is unnecessary to quote more of the speech  
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from which there can be extracted neither good divinity nor good humanity. "The glory of God," says the Wisdom of Solomon, "is to conceal a thing; the glory of the King is to find it out." But the glory of Milton's Deity is to explain a thing. The proud voluble candour of some of these speeches reminds us only of the author of *A Defence of the People of England*. In some of them there is even a flavour of uneasy boastfulness, as of one who is anxious not to be lessened in the estimation of the rebel adversary.

It may be pleaded that the epical necessities of the poem imposed finite conceptions, of one sort or another, upon Milton; and that, when once he had begun to define and explain, he was carried further and further along that perilous way without being fully conscious of whither he was tending. Yet his persistent accumulation of harsh and dread traits seems wilful in its nature; he bases his description, no doubt, on hints from Scripture, but he pays no attention to any that do not fall in with his own narrow and gloomy conception. Satan is permitted to rise from the burning lake—

That with reiterated crimes he might  
Heap on himself damnation,

When he arrives at the foot of the stairway that joins Heaven and the World—

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The stairs were then let down, whether to dare  
The Fiend by easy ascent, or aggravate  
His sad exclusion from the doors of bliss.

astronomy, it is suggested by "the affable Archangel," has perhaps been made a difficult subject in order to produce the droll fallacies of astronomers :

He his fabric of the Heavens  
Hath left to their disputes—perhaps to move  
His laughter at their quaint opinions wide.

And this conjecture is borne out by what happened when the builders of the tower of Babel were frustrated, for then—

Great laughter was in Heaven,  
And looking down to see the hubbub strange  
And hear the din.

Milton, in short, has hardened the heart of the God that hardened Pharaoh's heart, and has narrowed his love and his power.

Some kind of internal blindness must have visited him if he did not perceive what must inevitably be the effect of all this on the sympathies and interest of the reader. And the irony of the thing is that his own sympathies were not proof against the trial that he had devised for them. He lavished all his power, all his skill, and, in spite of himself, the greater part of his sympathy, on the splendid figure of Satan. He avoids calling *Para-*

*disse Lost* "an heroic poem"; when it was printed, in 1667, the title-page ran merely—*Paradise Lost, A Poem in Ten Books*. Had he inserted the word "heroic," the question as to who is the hero would have been broached at once. And to that question, if it be fairly faced, only one answer can be given,—the answer that has already been given by Dryden and Goethe, by Lord Chesterfield and Professor Masson. It was not for nothing that Milton stultified the professed moral of his poem, and emptied it of all spiritual content. He was not fully conscious, it seems, of what he was doing; but he builded better than he knew. A profound poetic instinct taught him to preserve epic truth at all costs. And the epic value of *Paradise Lost* is centred in the character and achievements of Satan.

Satan unavoidably reminds us of Prometheus, and although there are essential differences, we are not made to feel them essential. His very situation as the fearless antagonist of Omnipotence makes him either a fool or a hero, and Milton is far indeed from permitting us to think him a fool. The nobility and greatness of his bearing are brought home to us in some half-dozen of the finest poetic passages in the world. The most stupendous of the poet's imaginative creations are made the foil for a greater than themselves. Was ever terror more magnificently embodied than in the phantom figure of Death?—

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The other Shape—

If shape it might be called that shape had none  
Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb ;  
Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,  
For each seemed either—black it stood as Night,  
Fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell,  
And shook a dreadful dart : what seemed his head  
The likeness of a kingly crown had on.  
Satan was now at hand, and from his seat  
The monster moving onward came as fast  
With horrid strides ; Hell trembled as he strode.

This is the passage that drew from Burke a rapture of praise. But as it stands in the poem its elevation is a scaffolding merely, whence we may view the greatness of Satan :—

The undaunted Fiend what this might be admired—  
Admired, not feared (God and his Son except,  
Created thing naught valued he nor shunned).

The same magnificent effect of suggestion is wrought even more subtly in the scene where Satan approaches

the throne

Of *Ghaos*, and his dark pavilion spread  
Wide on the wasteful Deep.

Courteously and fearlessly Satan addresses himself to the monarch of the nethermost abyss. His speech contains no threats ; he asks guidance in his quest ; and, with politic forethought, promises that that quest, if successful, shall restore an outlying lost province to Chaos. There is nothing

in his words to cause consternation ; but the King is afraid :—

Him thus the anarch old,  
With faltering speech and visage incomposed,  
Answered :—" I know thee, stranger, who thou art—  
That mighty leading Angel, who of late  
Made head against Heaven's King, though overthrown."

In the war on the plains of Heaven Satan ranges up and down the fighting line, like Cromwell ; he fortifies his comrades to endurance, and encourages them to attack. In Hell he stands like a tower :—

His form had yet not lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured.

In his contests with Michael in Heaven and with Gabriel on Earth he never falls below himself :—

" If I must contend," said he,  
" Best with the best—the sender, not the sent ;  
Or all at once."

But his motive passions, it is objected, were envy, ambition, and hate, and his end was a crime. To which objection a modern poet has replied that a crime will serve as a measure for the spirit. Certainly to Satan there could never be imputed the sin of " the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin." And Milton has not left him devoid of the gentlest passion, the passion of pity :—

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Courteously and fearlessly Satan addresses himself to the monarch of the nethermost abyss. His speech contains no threats ; he asks guidance in his quest ; and, with politic forethought, promises that that quest, if successful, shall restore an outlying lost province to Chaos. There is nothing

in his words to cause consternation ; but the King is afraid :—

Him thus the anarch old,  
With faltering speech and visage incomposed,  
Answered :—" I know thee, stranger, who thou art—  
That mighty leading Angel, who of late  
Made head against Heaven's King, though overthrown."

In the war on the plains of Heaven Satan ranges up and down the fighting line, like Cromwell ; he fortifies his comrades to endurance, and encourages them to attack. In Hell he stands like a tower :—

His form had yet not lost  
All her original brightness, nor appeared  
Less than Archangel ruined, and the excess  
Of glory obscured.

In his contests with Michael in Heaven and with Gabriel on Earth he never falls below himself :—

" If I must contend," said he,  
" Best with the best—the sender, not the sent ;  
Or all at once."

But his motive passions, it is objected, were envy, ambition, and hate, and his end was a crime. To which objection a modern poet has replied that a crime will serve as a measure for the spirit. Certainly to Satan there could never be imputed the sin of " the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin." And Milton has not left him devoid of the gentlest passion, the passion of pity.—



the spirit of true hospitality. He feels it beneath him to attack innocence and helplessness, but public reasons compel him to do what otherwise he would abhor :—

So spake the Fiend, and with necessity,  
The tyrant's plea, excused his devilish deeds.

But no imputation is cast on the sincerity of the plea, and we are left to conceive of Satan as of a lover of beauty reluctantly compelled to shatter it in the pursuit of his high political aims. In the same way, when he finds Eve alone, on the morning of the temptation, he is disarmed by her beauty and innocence, and, for a spell, is struck "stupidly good." Truly, Adam might boast, with Gibbon, that he fell by a noble hand.

It is possible that by the time he had completed the Fourth Book, Milton became uneasy as to the effect he was producing. Up to that point magnanimity and courage had been almost the monopoly of Satan. He had been the Great Dissenter, the undaunted and considerate leader of an outcast minority. But now, in the description of the war in Heaven, there came a chance of doing something to right the balance. Milton makes the most of the episode of Abdiel, who has been led away with the rest of Satan's followers, upon false pretences, and who, when he discovers the true purpose of the expedition, makes a lonely stand for the right :—

Among the faithless faithful only he ; . . .  
 Ner number nor example with him wrought  
 To swerve from truth, or change his constant mind,  
 Though single.

And Abdiel, when he meets Satan again after the outbreak of the war, glories in his nonconformity, and hisses out defiance :—

Thou seest

All are not of thy train ; there be who faith  
 Prefer, and piety to God, though then  
 To thee not visible when I alone  
 Seemed in thy world erroneous to dissent  
 From all : my Sect thou seest ; now learn too late  
 How few sometimes may know when thousands err.

In this way Milton attempted to allay his scruples, and to divide the honours of dissent. Later on, after the Fall, when Satan returns to Hell with tidings of his exploit, the change of all the devils to serpents, and of their applause to "a dismal universal hiss" was perhaps devised to cast a slur upon the success of his mission. Some critics have professed to discern a certain progressive degradation and shrinkage in Satan as the poem proceeds. But his original creation lived on in the imagination and memory of Milton, and was revived, with an added pathos, in *Paradise Regained*. The most moving of all Satan's speeches is perhaps the long pleading <sup>tho't</sup> made in answer to the challenge of Christ, <sup>does</sup>

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There remains a more important person—Eve. And with Eve, since the beginning of Milton criticism, there enter all those questions concerning the comparative worthiness and the relative authority of husband and wife which critics of Milton so often and so gladly step aside to discuss. Every one knows the line:—

He for God only, she for God in him.

Almost every one knows the lines:—

Nothing lovelier can be found  
In woman than to study household good,  
And good works in her husband to promote.

Milton certainly shared the views of Knox concerning the "Monstrous Regiment of Women." It is unnecessary to meet him on his own ground, or to attempt a theory that shall explain or control Eve, Cleopatra, Joan of Arc, Catherine of the Medici, Mary Powell, and others of their sex. Such theories prove only that man is a generalising and

rationalising animal. The poet brought his fate on himself, for since Eve was the mother of mankind, he thought fit to make her the embodiment of a doctrine. But he also (a thing of far deeper interest) coloured his account by the introduction of personal memories and feelings. Of Eve, at least, he never writes indifferently. When he came to write *Samson Agonistes*, the intensity of his feelings concerning Dalila caused him to deviate from the best Greek tradition and to assign inappropriate matter to the Chorus. And even in his matter-of-fact *History of Britain*, the name of Boadicea awakens him to a fit of indignation with the Britons who upheld her rule. There is full scope in *Paradise Lost* for similar expressions of indignation. Adam, after the Fall, speaks of his wife as

Not to be trusted—longing to be seen  
Though by the Devil himself.

In the Eleventh Book the daughters of men are described as bred only

to sing, to dance,

To dress, and troll the tongue, and roll the eye. A

But Milton, it is sometimes forgotten, was also author of that beautiful eulogy of Eve in Eighth Book:—

When I approach

Her loveliness, so absolute she seems  
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Yet beauty, though injurious, hath strange power  
After offence returning, to regain  
Love once possessed.

To escape from the dominion of the tyrant is the duty of a wise man. When Raphael remarked that "Love . . . hath his seat in Reason, and is judicious," he committed himself to a statement which a longer experience of the world would have enabled him to correct. But Milton wished it true; and perhaps even lured himself into a belief of its truth. At any rate, when Satan, in *Paradise Regained*, expounds his opinion on the matter, it is found, for once, to be in substantial agreement with Raphael's:—

Beauty stands  
In the admiration only of weak minds  
Led captive; cease to admire, and all her plumes  
Fall flat, and shrink into a trivial toy,  
At every sudden slighting quite abashed.

It is a great loss to literature that Mrs.

Millamant, the delightful heroine of Congreve's comedy, was no reader of Milton. Her favourite author was Suckling:—

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Press me no more for that slight toy,  
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If she had a copy of the *Paradise Regained*, doubtless it stood in some conspicuous place, and was never opened,—like Mrs. Wishfort's "books over the chimney—Quarles and Prynne, and 'The Short View of the Stage,' with Bunyan's works, to entertain you." But all unawares she has answered the contention of Satan:—"O the vanity of these men!—Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did not commend us, we were not handsome! Now you must know that they could not commend one, if one was not handsome. Beauty the lover's gift!—Lord, what is a lover, that it can give? . . . One no more owes one's beauty to a lover than one's wit to an echo."

Like most men of an impressionable temperament and a strong will, Milton was not sympathetic, nor curious to place himself where he might see the world from a point of view other than his own. Besieged by their sensations and impressions, concerned above all things with maintaining their opinions and enforcing their beliefs on others, such men find enough to do within the citadel of their

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For either

He never shall find out fit mate, but such  
As some misfortune brings him, or mistake ;  
Or whom he wishes most shall seldom gain,  
Through her perverseness, but shall see her gained  
By a far worse ; or, if she love, withheld  
By parents ; or his happiest choice too late  
Shall meet, already linked and wedlock-bound  
To a fell adversary, his hate or shame.

But, with all this, of our two grand parents Eve is the better drawn and the more human. Milton did not intend that it should be so, but he could not help it. One consequence of the doctrine—

He for God only, she for God in him—

is that Adam's single impulse of unselfishness whereby he elects to share the offence and punishment of Eve, is a vice in him, a "bad com

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But now lead on ;

In me is no delay ; with thee to go  
Is to stay here ; without thee here to stay  
Is to go hence unwilling ; thou to me  
Art all things under Heaven, all places thou,  
Who for my wilful crime art banished hence.

She is generous and loving ; her only reproach addressed to Adam is that he acceded to her request, and permitted her, on that fateful morning, to do her gardening alone, among the roses and myrtles. She is a fair companion picture to set over against Dalila, and is utterly incapable of Dalila's hypocrisy in justifying private treachery by reasons of public

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## MILTON

licy. There is even a certain dramatic development in her character ; after she has eaten of the fruit, audacity and deceit appear in her reflections ; she meditates withholding from Adam the advantages of the tree, in order that she may become—

More equal, and perhaps—  
A thing not undesirable—sometimes  
Superior.

It is easy to understand how tired Eve might well become (even before the fallacious fruit was tasted) of Adam's carefully maintained superiority. On thinking, however, of the judgment that she may have to suffer, and of her own death, she resolves to draw him in, her motive being not fear, but a sudden movement of jealousy at the thought of—

Adam wedded to another Eve.

This is as near an approach to drama in the handling of a human situation as is to be found in all *Paradise Lost*.

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1 striking attitude, 2 some strong or majestic action, in its outward physical aspect.

In this, the loftiest part of his task, his other defects, as if by some hidden law of compensation, are splendidly redeemed. While he deals with abstract thought or moral truth his handling is tight, pedantic, and disagreeably hard. But when he comes to describe his epic personages and his embodied visions, all is power, and vagueness, and grandeur. His imagination, escaped from the narrow prison of his thought, rises like a vapour, and, taking shape before his eyes, proclaims itself his master.

No other poet has known so well how to portray, in a few strokes, effects of multitude and vastness. Now it is the sacred congregation in Heaven:—

About him all the Sanctities of Heaven  
 Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received  
 Bestitude past utterance.

Now the warrior host of Hell:—

He spake; and, to confirm his words, outflow  
 Millions of flaming swords, drawn from the thighs  
 Of mighty Cherutim, the sudden blaze  
 Far round illumined Hell.

In these, as in other like scenes, he preserves epic unity by throwing the whole into the distance. So after the approach of the Messiah to battle, "the poet," says Coleridge, "by one touch from

## MILTON

y. There is even a certain dramatic development in her character; after she has eaten of the fruit, audacity and deceit appear in her reflections; she meditates withholding from Adam the advantage of the tree, in order that she may become—

More equal, and perhaps—  
A thing not undesirable—sometimes  
Superior.

It is easy to understand how tired Eve might well become (even before the fallacious fruit was tasted) of Adam's carefully maintained superiority. On thinking, however, of the judgment that she may have to suffer, and of her own death, she resolves to draw him in, her motive being not fear, but a sudden movement of jealousy at the thought of—

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himself—‘far off their coming shone!’—makes the whole one image.” He describes at a greater range of vision than any other poet: the frame-work of his single scenes is often not less than a third of universal space. When he has added figure to figure in the endeavour to picture the multitudinous disarray of the fallen Angels on the lake, one line suffices to reduce the whole spectacle to its due dimensions beneath that cavernous tent of darkness:—

He called so loud that all the hollow deep  
Of Hell resounded.

The same effect of number and vastness, diminished and unified by the same reference to a larger setting, wherein all is seen at a glance, may be noted in the description of the raising of Satan’s standard in Hell:—

The imperial ensign, which, full high advanced,  
Shone like a meteor streaming to the wind,  
With gems and golden lustre rich emblazed,  
Seraphic arms and trophies; all the while  
Sonorous metal blowing martial sounds:  
At which the universal host up-sent  
A shout that tore Hell’s concave, and beyond  
Frighted the reign of Chaos and old Night.  
All in a moment through the gloom were seen  
Ten thousand banners rise into the air,  
With orient colours waving: with them rose  
A forest huge of spears; and thronging helms  
Appeared, and serried shields in thick array  
Of depth immeasurable.

Sometimes a line or two gives him scope enough for the rendering of one of these epic scenes, immense and vivid. The ruin and prostration of the rebels is made visible in two lines :—

Cherub and Seraph rolling in the flood  
With scattered arms and ensigns.

And the picture of the East rises at a touch :—

Dark faces with white silted turbans wreathed.

In the drawing of single attitudes Milton studies the same large decorum and majesty. He is never tempted into detail in the describing of gesture or action ; never loses the whole in the part. The bulk of *Paradise Lost* was written between the sixth and the thirteenth years of his blindness. Since the veil had fallen he had lived with the luminous shapes that he could picture against the dark. The human face had lost, in his recollection of it, something of its minuter delineation, but nothing of its radiance. On the other hand, the human figure, in its most significant gestures and larger movements, haunted his visions. His description of the appearance of the wife whom he had never seen is an early model of many of his later drawings. She comes to his bedside and leans over him, stretching forth her arms :

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Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined  
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High in the midst, exalted as a God,  
The Apostate in his sun-bright chariot sat,  
Idol of majesty divine, enclosed  
With flaming Cherubim and golden shields.

and the other, of his encounter with Gabriel:—

Satan, alarmed,  
Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
Like Teneriff or Atlas, unremoved :  
His stature reached the sky, and on his crest  
Sat Horror plumed ; nor wanted in his grasp  
What seemed both spear and shield.

In these, and in a hundred other notable passages, the images are as simple and broad as the emotional effects that they produce,—the sun, flame, gold, a mountain, the sky.

Some of the scenes and situations delineated by Milton are of a gentler and more elusive virtue



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agination was nourished on the Eastern scenery and sentiment of the Bible, shows himself powerfully affected by situations of this kind, as where, in the beginning of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, he describes the man with his face from his own home, running from the City of Destruction, and the group of his kindred calling after him to return :— "but the man put his fingers in his ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life : so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the plain."

Such another figure is Milton's Abdiel, who escaped from the rebel citadel—

And with retorted scorn his back he turned  
On those proud towers, to swift destruction doomed.

The perils of his flight are vaguely indicated by a few admirable touches in the opening of the next Book :—

All night the dreadless Angel, unpursued,  
Through Heaven's wide champaign held his way, till Morn  
Waked by the circling Hours, with rosy hand  
Unbarred the gates of Light.

A more signal instance of the same poetic effect is to be found in the wonderful close of *Paradise Lost*, where Adam and Eve are led down from the garden by the archangel Michael and are left standing in the vast plain below :—

✓ They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld  
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,  
Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate  
With dreadful faces thronged and fiery arms.  
Some natural tears they dropped, but wiped them soon;  
The world was all before them, where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide.  
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow, ✓  
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Criticism might exhaust itself in the effort to ✓  
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Addison, after a formal apology for "the smallest  
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Our first parents, he remarks, were guided by  
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they were reassured by Michael's predictions, and  
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He therefore suggests a distich more agreeable to the general scheme :—

Then hand in hand with social steps their way  
Through Eden took, with Heav'nly Comfort cheer'd

It is impossible to answer such criticism ; the organs of human speech are too frail. Let Bentley be left to contemplate with delight the hideous gash that his chopper has inflicted on the Miltonic rhythm of the last line. If Addison, for his part, had been less concerned with the opinions of M. Bossu, and the enumeration of the books of the *Æneid*, he might have found leisure to notice that the two later poems, *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*, are each brought to a close which exactly resembles the close of *Paradise Lost*. After the splendours in the last book of *Paradise Regained*—the fall of Satan, “smitten with amazement,” from the pinnacle of the Temple, the elaborate classical comparisons of Antæus and the Sphinx, and the triumphal chorus of Angels who bear the Son of God aloft with anthems of victory—the poem ends with the same exquisite lull :—

He, unobserved,  
Home to his mother's house private returned.

And *Samson Agonistes* brings as glorious a triumph to no less peaceful a close :—

And calm of mind, all passion spent.

The dying fall is the same in all three, and is the form of ending preferred by the musical and poetic genius of Milton.

Passages of a crowded and ostentatious magnificence are more frequent in *Paradise Lost* than in either of the two later poems. In *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* the enhanced severity of a style which rejects almost all ornament was due in part, no doubt, to a gradual change in Milton's temper and attitude. It is not so much that his power of imagination waned, as that his interest veered, turning more to thought and reflection, less to action and picture. In these two poems, at the last, he celebrated that

better fortitude  
Of patience and heroic martyrdom

which he had professed to sing in *Paradise Lost*. We are told by his nephew that he "could not bear with patience any such thing related to him" as that *Paradise Regained* was inferior to *Paradise Lost*. He was right; its merits and beauties are of a different and more sombre kind, yet of a kind perhaps further out of the reach of any other poet than even the constellated glories of *Paradise Lost* itself. It should be remembered that *Paradise Lost*, although it was written by Milton between the fiftieth and the fifty-seventh years of his age, was conceived by him, in its main outlines,

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not later than his thirty-fourth year. Two of the passages noticed above, where Satan addresses himself to the Sun and where the Angel leads Adam and Eve out of Paradise, embody situations which had appealed to his younger imagination. Some of the very words of Satan's address were written, we learn from Phillips, about 1642. And the expulsion of Adam and Eve seems to contain a reminiscence of the time when Milton was considering the history of Lot as a possible subject for an epic. The lines—

In either hand the hastening Angel caught  
Our lingering parents—

were perhaps suggested by the Scripture narrative —“And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, . . . and they brought him forth, and set him without the city” (Genesis xix. 16).

— The gravity and density of the style of *Paradise Lost* would have been beyond the power of youth, even of the youth of Milton; but the action of the poem, with all its vividness and vigour, could perhaps hardly have been first conceived in mature age. The composition was long deferred, so that in the decade which witnessed the production of all three great poems we see a strangely rapid development, or change rather, of manner. In *Paradise Lost* Milton at last delivered

himself of the work that had been brooding over him "with mighty wings outspread" during all the years of his manhood. But his imagination could not easily emancipate itself from that overmastering presence; and when he took up with a fresh task he gladly chose a theme closely related to the theme of *Paradise Lost*, and an opportunity of re-introducing some of the ancient figures. A kind-hearted, simple-minded, pig-headed young Quaker, called Thomas Ellwood, takes to himself credit for having suggested a sequel to the story of the Fall. "Thou hast said much here," he remarked to Milton, "of *Paradise Lost*; but what hast thou to say of *Paradise Found*?" The words, as it seemed to Ellwood, sank deep, and did their work. "He made me no answer, but after some time in a muse, then brake off that discourse and fell upon another subject." Perhaps while he sat in a muse Milton was attempting to find, with the plummet of conjecture, the abyss of human folly, "dark, wasteful, wild." So early in the fourth line of *Paradise Lost*, and already fully in the Third Book, he had treated of *Paradise Found* as an integral part of his subject. The episode of the Eleventh and Twelfth Books was wholly concerned with it. It seems not likely, however, that he caught at the suggestion as an excuse for a new and independent work of the commonest kinds of critical stupidity.

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 the kind that discovers something "unfinished" in a great work of art, and suggests desirable trimmings and additions. Milton knew that *Paradise Lost* was finished, in every sense. But room had not been found in it for all that now held the chief place in his matured thought. When he chose the theme of his great work, the actual temptation of man probably bulked much larger in his design than it does in the completed poem. His epic creatures, from being the machinery of the poem, usurped a share of the control. With all Milton's care and skill, there is very little interest in the actual plucking of the apple; Eve was too simple a pleader to make much of the case for the defence. Yet human life presented itself to Milton chiefly under the guise of a series of temptations. The title of one of Andrew Marvell's pieces might well be used to describe the whole canon of his poetry, from *L'Allegro* to *Samson Agonistes*—all are parts of *A Dialogue between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure*. To his youthful fancy Mirth and Melancholy present themselves in the likeness of rival goddesses, claiming allegiance, and offering gifts. The story of Samson is a story of temptation, yielded to through weakness, punished by ignominy, and, in the end, magnificently expiated. In *Comus* is shown how the temptations of creature-pleasure may be resisted by the chastity of

"resolved soul." In *Paradise Lost*, however, the resolved soul had somehow, failing Man, found for itself a congenial habitation in the Devil. The high and pure philosophy of the Lady and her brothers has no counterpart in the later and greater poem. Milton, therefore, willingly seized on the suggestion made by Ellwood; and in *Paradise Regained* exhibited at length, with every variety of form and argument, the spectacle of—

one man's firm obedience fully tried  
Through all temptation, and the Tempter foiled  
In all his wiles, defeated and repulsed

The subject of *Comus* is repeated; but in place of the dazzling allurements of the senses which is the temptation of the earlier poem, there is the temptation of the will, the appeal made in vain by Satan to those more strenuous and maturer passions of pride, ambition, love of wealth, and love of power. Instead of the innocent and instinctive purity of the Lady, which unmasks the fallacies of *Comus*, there is heard in *Paradise Regained* the voice of a high Stoical philosophy, strong in self-sufficiency, rich in illustrations drawn from the experience of the ages, and attributed, by this singular poet, to the Christ.

If his only purpose had been to make a worthy epical counterpart to *Paradise Lost*, those critics are doubtless right who think his chosen subject

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not altogether adequate to the occasion. The Fall of Man is best matched by the Redemption of Man—a subject which Milton, whether he knew it or not, was particularly ill-qualified to treat. It is sketched, hastily and prosaically, in the Twelfth Book of *Paradise Lost*; but there is no escaping from the conclusion that the central mystery of the Christian religion occupied very little space in Milton's scheme of religion and thought. Had he chosen this subject, the account given, in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, of the Descent into Hell might have furnished him with rich material for one part of his theme. The conquest of the upper world by Satan, narrated in *Paradise Lost*, might have had for natural sequel the triumphant descent into Hell of the King of Glory, and the liberation of the captives. For Milton's grandiose epical vein the theme has great opportunities, as a brief summary of the Gospel of Nicodemus will show:—

Karinus and Leucius, sons of Simeon, being raised from the dead, write what occurred during their sojourn in the realm of Hades: "While we were lying, along with our fathers, in the depth of the pit and in the uttermost darkness suddenly there appeared the golden hue of the sun, and a purple royal light shining in upon us. Then the father of all mankind and all the patriarchs and prophets rejoiced, saying: 'Tha

light is the author of everlasting light, who hath promised to translate us to everlasting light.' And Isaiah cried out, and said : 'This is the Light of the Father, the Son of God, according to my prophecy that I prophesied when I was alive upon the earth, "The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, beyond Jordan ; the people which sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." And now he has come, and has shone upon us who are sitting in death.'

Then Simeon spoke in a like strain of exultation. John the Baptist arrived, a herald of the King of Glory ; and Seth, at the bidding of Adam, told how Michael the Archangel had refused him oil from the tree of mercy for the anointing of the body of Adam when he was sick, and had comforted him with the assurance that when the years should be fulfilled Adam would be raised up again, and led into Paradise.

And even while the saints were rejoicing there broke out dissension among the lords of Hell. Satan, boasting of his latest exploit, told Hades, the prince of Hell, how he had led Jesus of Nazareth captive to death. But Hades was ill satisfied and asked, 'Perchance this is the same Jesus who by the word of his command took away Lazarus after he had been four days in corruption, whom I kept as dead ?' And Satan answered and

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id, 'It is the same.' And when Hades heard this he said to him, 'I adjure thee by thy powers and mine, bring him not to me. For when I heard the power of his word I trembled for fear, and all my officers were struck with amazement.' And while they were thus disputing, suddenly there was a voice as of thunder, and a shouting as of a multitude of spirits, saying, 'Lift up your gates, O ye princes, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting gates, and the King of Glory shall come in.' Then Hades, hearing this, said to Satan, 'Depart from me, and get thee out of my realm; if thou art a powerful warrior, fight against the King of Glory.' And he cast him forth from his habitations.

And while David and Isaiah were speaking, recalling the words of their prophecy, there came to Hell, in the form of a man, the Lord of Majesty, and lighted up the eternal darkness, and burst asunder the indissoluble chains, and seizing Satan delivered him over to the power of Hades, but Adam he drew with him to his brightness.

Then Hades receiving Satan reviled him vehemently and said, 'O Prince of perdition, and author of extermination, derision of angels and scorn of the just, why didst thou do this thing? All thy riches which thou hast acquired by the tree of transgression and the loss of Paradise, thou hast now lost by the tree of the cross, and all thy joy has perished.'

But the Lord, holding Adam by the hand, delivered him to Michael the Archangel, and all the saints followed Michael the Archangel, and he led them into Paradise, clad with mercy and glory."

Michael would hardly have entertained for a moment the idea of a subject taken from one of the apocryphal prophecies. And even if he had felt so scrupulous on this point, the theme of the *Harvesting of Israel* would hardly have commended itself to him in his later years, least of all its triumphant close. His interest was now centred rather in the saying of the wise than in the deeds of the mighty. The "crude apple that diverted Eve" was indeed a simple theme compared with the profound topics that are treated in *Samson Agonistes*. The dark tangle of human life; the inscrutable course of Divine providence; the punishment so unwittingly and lightly incurred, yet lying on a whole nation "heavy as frost, and deep almost as life"; the temptation presenting itself in the guise neither of pleasure, nor of ambition, but of despair; and, through all, the towering assertion of unswerving trust and unflinching acquiescence in the will of God; the song of the Chorus—

Just are the ways of God  
And justifiable to man

finding an echo in Samson's death

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Nothing of all these evils hath befallen me  
But justly ; I myself have brought them on ;  
Sole author I, sole cause ;

—these together make up a theme where there is no possible place for the gay theology of *Paradise Lost*. The academic proof of God's justice, contained in the earlier poem, if it were introduced into *Samson Agonistes* could be met only with the irony of Job : "Am I a sea, or a sea-monster, that thou settest a watch over me? . . . What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him, and that thou shouldest visit him every morning, and try him every moment?" The question has become a real one ; not to be answered now by the dogmatism and dialectic of a system. Milton's bewilderment and distress of mind are voiced in the cry of the Chorus :—

Yet toward these thus dignified thou oft  
Amidst their height of noon  
Changest thy countenance, and thy hand with no regard  
Of highest favours past  
From thee or them, or them to thee of service.

And there follows their humble prayer, heard and answered with Divine irony on the very day of their asking :—

So deal not with this once thy glorious champion,  
The image of thy strength and mighty minister.  
What do I beg? How hast thou dealt already?

Behold him in this state calamitous, and turn  
His labours, for thou canst, to peaceful end.

In the days that now, as he looked back on his youth and manhood, must have seemed to him both distant and barren, Milton had sought for triumph, in action and in argument. His seeking was denied him; but he found peace, and the grace to accept it.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE STYLE OF MILTON : METRE AND DICTION

to approach the question of Milton's poetic style thus late in the course of this treatise is to fall into the absurdity of the famous art-critic, who, lecturing on the Venus of Milo, devoted the last and briefest of his lectures to the shape of that noble work of art. In truth, since Milton died, his name is become the mark, not of a biography nor of a theme, but of a style—the most distinguished in our poetry. But the task of literary criticism is, at the best, a task of such disheartening difficulty, that those who attempt it should be humoured if they play long with the fringes of the subject, and wait for courageous moments to attack essentials.

In one sense, of course, and that not the least important, the great works of Milton were the product of the history and literatures of the world. Cycles ferried his cradle. Generations guided him. All forces were steadily employed to complete him.

But when we attempt to separate the single strands of his complex genealogy, to identify and arrange the influences that made him, the essential somehow escapes us. The genealogical method in literary history is both interesting and valuable, but we are too apt, in our admiration for its lucid procedure, to forget that there is one thing which it will never explain, and that thing is poetry. Books beget books; but the mystery of conception still evades us. We display, as if in a museum, all the bits of thought and fragments of expression that Milton may have borrowed from Homer and Virgil, from Ariosto and Shakespeare. Here is a far-fetched conceit, and there is an elaborately jointed comparison. But these choice fragments and samples were to be had by any one for the taking; what it baffles us to explain is how they came to be of so much more use to Milton than ever they were to us. In any dictionary of quotations you may find great thoughts and happy expressions as plentiful and as cheap as sand, and, for the most part, quite as useless. These are dead thoughts: to catalogue, compare, and arrange them is within the power of any competent literary workman; but to raise them to blood-heat again, to breathe upon them and vitalise them is the sign that proclaims a poet. The ledger school of criticism, which deals only with borrowings and lendings, ingeniously traced and accurately re-

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# MILTON:

are not Ethnickes, we forsooth at least professe not so ;  
 why range we then to Ethnickes' trade ? Come back, where  
 will ye go ?  
 el me, is Christe or Cupide lord ? Doth God or Venus  
 reign ?

But he cried to deaf ears, and the Elizabethan age  
 produced no body of sacred poetry worth a record.  
 The beautiful metrical version of the Psalms,  
 made by Sir Philip Sidney and his sister, remained  
 in manuscript for centuries. Drayton's *Harmonie*  
*of the Church* was suppressed. Robert Southwell,  
 whose lyrics on sacred subjects give him a unique  
 place among the poets of his age, joins in the oft-  
 repeated complaint :—

Stil finest wits are 'stilling Venus' rose,  
 In Paynim toyes the sweetest vaines are spent ;  
 To Christian workes few have their talents lent.

It was left for George Herbert and his con-  
 temporaries to take up the attempt once more—  
 this time with better success—"to reprove the  
 vanity of those many love poems that are daily  
 writ and consecrated to Venus, and to bewail that  
 so few are writ that look towards God and  
 heaven."

Cannot thy dove  
 Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight ?

Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,  
 Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name ?

But although Herbert and his successors, in their

devotional lyrics, gave a whole new province to English poetry, they left the idolatrous government of the older provinces undisturbed. Dramatic and narrative poetry went on in the old way, and drew their inspiration from the old founts. Year by year, as our native poetic wealth increased, it became more and more difficult to break with the past, and to lead poetry back to Zion. Nature and precedent seemed allied against the innovation. The worst of religious poetry, as Johnson more than once pointed out, is its poverty of subject, and its enforced chastity of treatment. You cannot make a picture out of light alone; there must be something to break it on. Then, too, there was Shakespeare to be reckoned with: he had written no hymns nor spiritual songs; among the works of God, he had found man to be deserving of his unremitting attention; yet, while a certain monotony of manner afflicted the singers of good and godly ballads, he had seemed never at a loss for a subject, never at the end of the copious inspiration that he drew from his unsanctified themes.

Nevertheless, the seventeenth century, which stirred so many questions in politics and criticism, stirred this also; the fitness of sacred subjects for heroic poetry was debated long and ardently both in France and England, and many experiments were made. These experiments belong, as might be

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expected, mainly to the time of the civil troubles. It was then that the versifying of the Psalms became a desolating industry; and Mr. Zachary Boyd, an ornament of the University of Glasgow, having worked his will on King David, made bold rhyming raids on passages of the Bible that are usually allowed to rest in prose. The high places of scholarship felt the new infection. Early in 1648, Joseph Beaumont, afterwards Master of Peterhouse, and Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, published his poem called *Psyche, or Love's Mystery*, in twenty cantos. "My desire is," he says in the preface, "that this book may prompt better wits to believe that a divine theam is as capable and happy a subject of poetical ornament, as any pagan or humane device whatsoever." The poem is about four times as long as *Paradise Lost*, and was written in eleven months which circumstance, his admiring biographer allows, "may create some surprise in a reader unacquainted with the vigorous imagination, and fertile flow of fancy, which so remarkably distinguished our author from the common class of writers." A further explanation by the same eulogist, who edited Beaumont's *Original Poems* in 1749, makes all clear. "Our Author," appears, "did not look upon poetry as the serious business of his life; for whilst he was thus ambling his leisure hours with the Muses, he wrote :

and clear commentary upon the Book of Ecclesiastes, and large critical notes upon the Pentateuch." After this, the astonished reader will perhaps be disinclined to verify the statement, reluctantly made, that in the poems of our author "we sometimes meet with a vicious copiousness of style, at others, with an affectation of florid, gay, and tedious descriptions; nor did he always use the language of nature."

Next, Cowley "came in robustiously and put for it with a deal of violence" in his sacred poem entitled  *Davideis* . In the exordium of the First Book he proclaims his mission:—

Too long the *Muses-Lands* have *Heathen* bin  
 Their *Gods* too long were *Devils*, and *Vertues Sin*;  
 But *Thou, Eternal World*, hast call'd forth *Me*,  
 Th' *Apostle*, to convert that *World* to *Thee*:  
 T' unbind the charms that in slight *Fables* lie,  
 And teach that *Truth* is truest *Poesie*.

But it was not to be. His "polisht *Pillars* of strong *Verse*" were destined never to carry a roof. The theme, so vigorously introduced, soon languished; and by the time he had completed a Fourth Book, it lay, for all his nursing skill, prematurely dead on his hands. The poem is not finished, and yet there is nothing to add.

After Cowley in date of composition, but before him in date of publication, Davenant in his *Gondibert* shows traces of the prevalent ambition.

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But it was not to be. His "polisht *Pillars* of strong *Verse*" were destined never to carry a roof. The theme, so vigorously introduced, soon languished; and by the time he had completed a Fourth Book, it lay, for all his nursing skill, prematurely dead on his hands. The poem is not finished, and yet there is nothing to add.

After Cowley in date of composition, but before him in date of publication, Davenant in his *Gondibert* shows traces of the prevalent ambition. \*



He rejects all supernatural fables, and makes it a point of sound doctrine to choose only Christians for his characters. But that poem, too, broke off in the middle.

In France the question had been as zealously discussed, and had been illustrated by experiments no less elaborate. In 1657, a year after the appearance of Cowley's *Davideis*, Desmarets de Saint-Sorlin brought out his sacred poem of *Clovis*, with a great flourish of trumpets, and a long prose demonstration that its theme was the grandest a French poet could choose. The real supernatural of the Christian religion, so he argued, is a subject much nobler for poetry than the pagan mythology, as the sunlight is brighter than the shadow. The controversy dragged on till 1673, when Boileau, in the third book of his *Poetic*, settled the question for the nonce, and fixed the opinion of the succeeding generation of critics. He casts an equal ridicule upon *Clovis* and upon the theory which it was designed to illustrate:—

The arts of fiction give the air of lies  
Even to the most unquestioned verities ;  
And what a pious entertainment, too,  
The yells of Satan and his damnèd crew,  
When, proud to assail your Hero's matchless might,  
With God himself they wage a doubtful fight.

So the burial of *Clovis* was hastened by ridicule.  
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that poem by Boileau holds equally good against *Paradise Lost*, which Milton, knowing as little of Boileau as Boileau knew of him, had published some six years earlier. *Paradise Lost*, it might almost be said, is superior to *Clovis* in nothing, except the style. By the force of his genius and the magic of his style, Milton succeeded in an attempt thought hopeless by the best critical judges of his century, and won his way through a ravine that was strewn with the corpses of his epic predecessors.

His courage and originality are witnessed also by the metre that he chose for his poem. To us blank verse seems the natural metre for a long serious poem. Before Milton's day, except in the drama, it had only once been so employed—in an Elizabethan poem of no mark or likelihood, called *A Tale of Two Swannes*. While Milton was writing *Paradise Lost* the critics of his time were discussing whether the rhymed couplet or some form of stanza was fitter for narrative poetry, and whether the couplet or blank verse better suited the needs of drama. As no one, before Milton, had maintained in argument that blank verse was the best English measure for narrative poetry dealing with lofty themes, so no critic had ever been at the pains to refute that opinion. In the year of the publication of *Paradise Lost*, Dryden delivered his judgment, that the rhymed couplet

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In these two cardinal points, then—the matter and the form of his poem—Milton was original. For the one there was no true precedent in English; for the other there was no precedent that might not rather have been called a warning. His matter was to be arranged and his verse handled by his own ingenuity and at his own peril. He left highroad behind him, along which many a tuneless pauper has since limped; but before him he found nothing but the jungle and false fires. In considering his style, therefore, it is well to treat the problem as it presented itself to him, and to follow

his achievement as he won step by step out of the void.

✓ There were two great influences in English poetry, other than the drama, when Milton began to write : the influence of Spenser and the influence of Donne. Only the very slightest traces of either can be discerned in Milton's early verse. There are some Spenserian cadences in the poem *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, written in his seventeenth year :—

Or wert thou of the golden-wingèd host  
Who, having clad thyself in human weed,  
To earth from thy prefixed seat didst post,  
And after short abode fly back with speed,  
As if to show what creatures Heaven doth breed ;  
Thereby to set the hearts of men on fire  
To scorn the sordid world, and unto Heaven aspire ?

The later verses on *The Passion*, written in the same metre, are perhaps the last in which Milton echoes Spenser, however faintly. Meanwhile, in the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*, he had struck a note that was his own, and it is not surprising that he left the poem on the Passion unfinished, "nothing satisfied with what was begun."

As for the great Dean of St. Paul's, there is no evidence that Milton was touched by him, or, for that matter, that he had read any of his poems. In the verses written *At a Vacation Exercise*, he expressly sets aside

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Those new-fangled toys and trimming slight  
Which takes our late fantastics with delight ;

and he very early came to dislike the fashionable conceits that ran riot in contemporary English verse. A certain number of conceits, few and poor enough, is to be found scattered here and there in his early poems. Bleak Winter, for instance, is represented in three cumbrous stanzas, as the slayer of the Fair Infant :—

For he, being amorous on that lovely dye  
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss,  
But killed, alas ! and then bewailed his fatal bliss.

In the lines on Shakespeare the monument promised to the dead poet is a marvel of architecture and sculpture, made up of all his readers, frozen to statues by the wonder and astonishment that they feel when they read the plays. But perhaps the nearest approach to a conceit of the metaphysical kind is to be found in that passage of Comus, where the Lady accuses Night of having stolen her brothers :—

O thievish Night,  
Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end,  
In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars  
Which Nature hung in heaven, and filled their lamps  
With everlasting oil to give due light  
To the misled and lonely traveller ?

When Milton does fall into a vein of conceit, is generally both trivial and obvious, with none

the saving quality of Donne's remoter extravagances. In Donne they are hardly extravagances; the vast overshadowing canopy of his imagination seems to bring the most wildly dissimilar things together with ease. To his unfettered and questioning thought the real seems unreal, the unreal real; he moves in a world of shadows, cast by the lurid light of his own emotions; they take grotesque shapes and beckon to him, or terrify him. All realities are immaterial and insubstantial; they shift their expressions, and lurk in many forms, leaping forth from the most unlikely disguises, and vanishing as suddenly as they came.

Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;  
 A vapour sometime like a bear or lion,  
 A tower'd citadel, a pendent rock,  
 A forked mountain, or blue promontory  
 With trees upon't that nod unto the world,  
 And mock our eyes with air: thou hast seen these signs;  
 They are black Vesper's pageants.

They are the poems of John Donne. Nothing could be further from the manner of Milton, or less likely to overcome his own positive imagination. Here are two examples of Donne's best poetic manner:—

But yet thou canst not die, I know;  
 To leave this world behind, is death;  
 But when thou from this world wilt go,  
 The whole world vapours with thy breath.

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d again :—

Twice or thrice had I loved thee,  
Before I knew thy face or name ;  
So in a voice, so in a shapeless flame  
Angels affect us oft, and worshipp'd be.

Let it be considered what Milton means by the terms "World" and "Angel," how clear an external reality each embodies for him. Any forced comparison used by him is not an attempt to express a subtlety, but merely a vicious trick of the intellect. The virtues of the metaphysical school were impossible virtues for one whose mind had no tincture of the metaphysic. Milton, as has been said already, had no deep sense of mystery. One passage of *Il Penseroso*, which might be quoted against this statement, is susceptible of an easier explanation :—

And if aught else great bards beside  
In sage and solemn tunes have sung  
Of turneys, and of trophies hung,  
Of forests, and enchantments drear,  
Where more is meant than meets the ear.

✓ He alludes no doubt to Spenser, and by the last line intends only allegory—a definite moral signification affixed to certain characters and stories—not the mystic correspondences that Donne loves. • The most mysterious lines in *Comus* are these :—

A thousand fantasies

Begin to throng into my memory,  
Of calling shapes, and beckoning shadows dire,  
And airy tongues that syllable men's names  
On sands and shores and desert wildernesses.

They are purely Elizabethan and reminiscent. But if the stranger beauties of the metaphysical school were beyond his reach, its vices touched him wonderfully little, so that his conceits are merely the rare flaws of his early work.

The dramatists were a much more potent influence than either Spenser or the metaphysical school. He learned his blank verse from the dramatists. Perhaps he took the subject of *Comus* from the *Old Wives' Tale* of George Peele ; and when he set himself to write a masque he was doubtless well acquainted with the works of the chief master in that kind, Ben Jonson. William Godwin, in his *Lives of Edward and John Phillips*, expresses the opinion that Milton studied the works of Jonson more assiduously than those of any other Elizabethan. The specific evidence that he cites—a few passages of possible reminiscence—is not convincing. He has no more striking coincidence to show than the resemblance between a phrase in *Il Penseroso* :—

Come, but keep thy wonted state

and two lines of Jonson's *Hymn to Cynthia* :—

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Seated in thy silver chair  
State in wonted manner keep.

If the original genius of a poet is to be sworn away at this rate, there will soon come a time when no man is secure. Both words are common in Elizabethan English; if their occurrence in a single line is to warrant a charge of plagiarism, the next step will be to make them Jonson's property, and to forbid the use of either to all but the tribe of Ben. Milton doubtless studied Jonson's works; and, if specific resemblances are both weighed and counted, a good case can be made out for the influence of Jonson's prose on the author of the *Arcopagitica*. But the fact is that criticism finds itself here in a region where this minute matching of phrase with phrase is useless or misleading. Milton's early poems grew on Elizabethan soil, and drank Elizabethan air. It matters little that there are few verbal coincidences; the influence is omnipresent, easy to feel, impossible to describe in detail. From whom but the Elizabethans could he have learned to write thus?—

Fly, envious Time, till thou run out thy race :  
Call on the lazy leaden-stepping Hours,  
Whose speed is but the heavy plummet's pace ;  
And glut thyself with what thy womb devours.

The Elizabethan style is not to be mistaken, the high-figured phrases, loosely welded together,



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At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound  
 Rose like a steam of rich distilled perfumes,  
 And stole upon the air, that even Silence  
 Was took ere she was ware, and wished she might  
 Deny her nature, and be never more  
 Still to be so displaced. I was all ear,  
 And took in strains that might create a soul  
 Under the ribs of Death.

This has the happy audacity of Shakespeare, and his delight in playing with logic ; it is almost witty. The Miltonic audacity of the later poems is far less diffuse and playful. When the nightingale sings, in *Paradise Lost*, "Silence was pleased." When Adam begs the Angel to tell the story of the Creation, he adds, "Sleep, listening to thee, will watch." Either of these paradoxes would have been tormented and elaborated into a puzzle by a true Elizabethan.

✓ Milton, then, began as a pupil of the dramatists. ✓ But his tendencies and ambitions were not dramatic, so he escaped the diseases that afflicted the drama in its decadence. When he began to write blank verse, the blank verse of the dramatists, his contemporaries, was fast degenerating into more or less rhythmical prose. ✓ Suckling and Davenant and their fellows not only used the utmost license of redundant syllables at the end of the line, but hustled and slurred the syllables in the middle till the line was a mere gabble, and interspersed broken lines so plentifully that it became im-

## STYLE: METRE AND DICTION 13

possible even for the most attentive ear to follow the metre. A brief description of a Puritan waiting-woman may be taken as an illustration from Jasper Mayne's comedy of *The City Match* (1639). As a sample of blank verse it is perhaps somewhat smoother and more regular than the average workmanship of that time —

She works religious petitions, for flowers  
 She'll make church-narratives. Her needle such  
 So sanctify my church-clothes, besides  
 My smock-sleeves have been only smock-clothes,  
 And are so learned, that I have a name  
 All my apparel will be quoted on  
 Some pure instruction. Yesterday I went  
 To see a lady that has a parrot: my mother  
 While I was in *dispute* converted the fowl,  
 And now it can speak nought but Knox's words;  
 So there's a parrot lost.

Blank verse that has learned to tolerate such lines as the two here set in italics can only end by becoming prose. And, indeed, that was the destined development of the drama, even had the theatres never been closed under the Commonwealth. The history of blank verse reflects with curious exactness the phases of the history of the drama. When the metre was first set on the stage, in the Senecan drama, it was stiff and slow-moving; each line was monotonously accented, and divided from the next by so heavy a stress that the absence of rhyme seemed a wilful injury

At last a soft and solemn-breathing sound  
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 So sanctify my ears of this, O Anna  
 My smock-sleeves are sanctified with her words,  
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 Some pure instructions. I remember I went  
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done to the ear. Such as it was, it suited the solemn moral platitudes that it was called upon to utter. Peele, Marlowe, and Shakespeare made the drama lyrical in theme and treatment; the measure, adapting itself to the change, became lyrical in their hands. As the drama grew in scope and power, addressing itself to a greater diversity of matter, and coming to closer grips with the realities of life, the lyrical strain was lost, and blank verse was stretched and loosened and made elastic. During the twenty years of Shakespeare's dramatic activity, from being lyrical it tended more and more to become conversational, in Comedy, and in Tragedy to depend for its effects rather on the rhetorical rise and fall of the period than on the unit of the line. From the drama of Charles the First's time, when inferior workmen had carried these licenses to the verge of confusion, it is a perfectly natural transition to the heroic couplet for Tragedy and the well-bred prose of Etherege for Comedy. Blank verse has lost its character; it had to be made vertebrate to support the modish extravagances of the heroic plays; and this was done by the addition of rhyme. Comedy, on the other hand, was tending already, long before the civil troubles, to seek satire and the life-like representation of contemporary character and manners, so that pr

At the time when blank verse was yielding to decay, Milton took it up, and used it neither for conversational nor for rhetorical purposes. In the interests of pure poetry and melody he tightened its joints, stiffened its texture, and one by one gave up almost all the licenses that the dramatists had used. From the first he makes a sparing use of the double ending. The redundant syllable in the middle of the line, which he sometimes allows himself in *Comus*, does not occur in *Paradise Lost*. In the later poem he adopts strict practices with regard to elision, which, with some trifling exceptions, he permits only in the case of contiguous open vowels, and of short unstressed vowels separated by a liquid consonant, in such words, for instance, as "dis-solute," or "amorous." By a variety of small observances, which, when fully stated, make up a formidable code, he mended the shambling gait of the loose dramatic blank verse, and made of it a worthy epic metre.

In a long poem variety is indispensable, and he preserved the utmost freedom in some respects. He continually varies the stresses in the line, their number, their weight, and their incidence, letting them fall, when it pleases his ear, on the odd as well as on the even syllables of the line. The pause or *cæsura* he permits to fall at any place in the line, usually towards the middle, but, on occasion, even after the first or ninth syllables.

done to the ear. Such as it was, it suited the solemn moral platitudes that it was called upon to utter. Peele, Marlowe, and Shakespeare made the drama lyrical in theme and treatment; the measure, adapting itself to the change, became lyrical in their hands. As the drama grew in scope and power, addressing itself to a greater diversity of matter, and coming to closer grips with the realities of life, the lyrical strain was lost, and blank verse was stretched and loosened and made elastic. During the twenty years of Shakespeare's dramatic activity, from being lyrical it tended more and more to become conversational in Comedy, and in Tragedy to depend for its effects rather on the rhetorical rise and fall of the period than on the unit of the line. From the drama of Charles the First's time, when inferior workmen had carried these licenses to the verge of confusion, it is a perfectly natural transition to the heroic couplet for Tragedy and the well-bred prose of Etherege for Comedy. Blank verse had lost its character; it had to be made vertebrate to support the modish extravagances of the heroic plays; and this was done by the addition of rhyme. Comedy, on the other hand, was tending already, long before the civil troubles, to social satire and the life-like representation of contemporary character and manners, so that prose was :        ctive        t.

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His chief study, it will be found, is to vary the word in relation to the foot, and the sentence in relation to the line. No other metre allows of anything like the variety of blank verse in this regard, and no other metrist makes so splendid a use of its freedom. He never forgets the pattern; yet he never stoops to teach it by the repetition of a monotonous tattoo. Hence there are, perhaps, fewer one-line quotations to be found in the works of Milton than in the works of any other master of blank verse. De Quincey speaks of the "slow planetary wheelings" of Milton's verse, and the metaphor is a happy one; the verse revolves on its axis at every line, but it always has another motion, and is related to a more distant centre.

It may well be doubted whether Milton could have given a clear exposition of his own prosody. In the only place where he attempts it he finds the elements of musical delight to consist in "apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another." By "apt numbers" he probably meant the skilful handling of stress-variation in relation to the sense. But the last of the three is the essential of Miltonic blank verse. There lies the secret for whoso can divine it.

Every well-marked type of blank verse has its natural gait or movement of its own, which it falls into during its ordinary uninspired mood.

Tennyson's blank verse, when it is not carefully guarded and varied, drops into a kind of fluent sing-song. Examples may be taken, almost at random, from the *Idylls of the King*. Here is one :—

So all the ways were safe from shore to shore,  
But in the heart of Arthur pain was lord.

The elements of musical delight here are almost barbarous in their simplicity. There is a surfeit of assonance—*all, shore, shore, lord ; heart, Arthur ; ways, safe, pain*. The alliteration is without complexity,—a dreary procession of sibilants. Worst of all are the monotonous incidence of the stress, and the unrelieved, undistinguished, crowded poverty of the Saxon monosyllables.

No two such consecutive lines were ever written by Milton. His verse, even in its least admirable passages, does not sing, nor trip with regular alternate stress ; its movement suggests neither dance nor song, but rather the advancing march of a body of troops skilfully handled, with incessant changes in their disposition as they pass over broken ground. He can furnish them with wings when it so pleases him. No analysis of his prosody can explain the wonders of his workmanship. But it is not idle to ask for a close attention to the scansion of lines like these, wherein he describes the upward progress of the Son of God and his escort after the Creation :—

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## MILTON

The heavens and all the constellations rung,  
The planets in their station listening stood,  
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant.

the last line the first four words marshal the  
great procession in solid array; the last two lift  
high into the empyrean. Let any one attempt  
to get the same upward effect with a stress, how-  
ever light, laid on the last syllable of the line, or  
with words of fewer than three syllables apiece,  
and he will have to confess that, however abstruse  
the rules of its working may be, there is virtue in  
metrical cunning. The passage in the Seventh  
Book from which these lines are quoted would  
justify an entire treatise. The five regular alternate  
stresses first occur in a line describing the progress  
over the wide plain of Heaven:—

He through Heaven,  
That opened wide her blazing portals, led  
To God's eternal house direct the way.

But, indeed, the examination of the music of  
Milton involves so minute a survey of technical  
detail as to be tedious to all but a few lovers of  
theory. The laws of music in verse are very  
subtle, and, it must be added, very imperfectly  
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How carefully and incessantly Milton adjusted the  
sound to the sense is known to every reader of

*Paradise Lost*. The dullest ear is caught by the contrast between the opening of the gates of Heaven—

Heaven opened wide  
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound  
On golden hinges moving—

and the opening of those other gates—

On a sudden open fly,  
With impetuous recoil and jarring sound,  
The infernal doors, and on their hinges grate  
Harsh thunder, that the lowest bottom shook  
Of Erebus.

But there are many more delicate instances than these. In the choruses of *Samson Agonistes*, when he reaches the top of his skill, Milton varies even the length of the line. So he has hardly a rule left, save the iambic pattern, which he treats merely as a point of departure or reference, a background or framework to carry the variations imposed upon it by the luxuriance of a perfectly controlled art. The great charm of the metre of *Wit*, which Charles Lamb admired and imitated, lies in the facile combination of what, for the sake of brevity, may be called the iambic and trochaic movements. In *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* Milton had proved his mastery of both its resources. The gaiety of these lines—

Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
Jest, and youthful Jollity—

The heavens and all the constellations rung,  
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In the last line the first four words marshal the great procession in solid array; the last two lift it high into the empyrean. Let any one attempt to get the same upward effect with a stress, however light, laid on the last syllable of the line, or with words of fewer than three syllables apiece, and he will have to confess that, however abstruse the rules of its working may be, there is virtue in metrical cunning. The passage in the Seventh Book from which these lines are quoted would justify an entire treatise. The five regular alternate stresses first occur in a line describing the progress over the wide plain of Heaven :—

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Haste thee, Nymph, and bring with thee  
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esses easily into the solemnity of these—

But let my due feet never fail  
To walk the studious cloister's pale.

In *Samson Agonistes* he sought to extend something of the same liberty to the movement of blank verse. He freely intermixes the falling with the rising stress, shifting the weights from place to place, and often compensating a light patter of syllables in the one half of the line by the introduction of two or three consecutive strong stresses in the other half. Under this treatment the metre of *Gorboduc* breaks into blossom and song:—

O, how comely it is, and how reviving  
To the spirits of just men long oppressed,  
When God into the hands of their deliverer  
Puts invincible might.

To try to explain this marvel of beauty is to beat the air.

By his deliberate attention to the elements of verbal melody Milton gave a new character to English blank verse. But this is not all. Quite as important is the alteration that he made in the character of English poetic diction.

The essence of the lyric is that it is made up of phrases, not of words. The lines run easily because they run on tracks chosen for their ease by the instinct of generations and worn smooth by use. The lyrical phrase, when the first two c

three words of it have been pronounced, finishes itself. From Carew's "Ask me no more," with its long train of imitations, to the latest banality of the music-halls, the songs that catch the ear catch it by the same device. The lyric, that is to say, is almost always dependent for its music on easy idiomatic turns of speech. The surprising word occurs rarely; with all the greater effect inasmuch as it is embedded in phrases that slip from the tongue without a trace of thought or effort. These phrases naturally allow of little diversity of intonation; they have the unity of a single word, a single accepted emphasis, and a run of lightly-stressed syllables more or less musical in sequence.

All this Milton changed. He chooses his every word. You cannot guess the adjective from the substantive, nor the end of the phrase from its beginning. He is much given to inverting the natural English order of epithet and noun, that he may gain a greater emphasis for the epithet. His style is not a simple loose-flowing garment, which takes its outline from its natural fall over the figure, but a satin brocade, stiff with gold, exactly fitted to the body. There is substance for it to clothe; but, as his imitators quickly discovered, it can stand alone. He packs his meaning into the fewest possible words, and studies economy in every trifle. In his later poetry there are no

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gliding connectives; no polysyllabic conjunctive clauses, which fill the mouth while the brain prepares itself for the next word of value; no otiose epithets, and very few that court neglect by their familiarity. His poetry is like the eloquence of the Lord Chancellor Bacon, as described by Ben Jonson:—"No man ever spake more neatly, more pressly, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough, or look aside from him, without loss." It is this quality of Milton's verse that makes the exercise of reading it aloud a delight and a trial. Every word is of value. There is no mortar between the stones, each is held in place by the weight of the others, and helps to uphold the building. In reading, every word must be rendered clearly and articulately; to drop one out, or to slur it over, is to take a stone from an arch. Indeed, if Lamb and Hazlitt are right in thinking that Shakespeare's greatest plays cannot be acted, by the same token Milton's greatest poems cannot be read aloud. For his most sonorous passages the human voice is felt to be too thin an instrument; the lightest word in the line demands some faint emphasis so that the strongest could not be raised to true value unless it were roared through so melodious megaphone.

# STYLE : METRE AND DICTION 199

The carefully jewelled mosaic style was practised very early by Milton. It occurs already in the hymn on the Nativity :—

See how from far upon the eastern road  
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet :  
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode  
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet.

The same deliberateness and gentle pause of words one after another rounding and falling like clear drops is found in the song of the Spirit i *Comus* :—

Sabrina fair,  
Listen where thou art sitting  
Under the glassy, cool, translucent wave,  
In twisted braids of lilies knitting  
The loose train of thy amber-dropping hair.

This is the effect which Sir Henry Wotton, Milton's earliest critic, speaks of, in a letter to Milton, as "a certain Doric delicacy in your songs, and odes, whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language."

There are poems, and good poems among the number, written on a more diffuse principle. If you miss one line you find the idea repeated or persisting in the next. It is quite possible to derive pleasure from the *Faerie Queene* by attending to the leading words, and, for the rest, floating forward on the melody. You can catch the drift in case. The stream circles in so many eddies

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that to follow it laboriously throughout its course is felt to be hardly necessary : miss it once and you can often join it again at very near the same point. "But a reader of Milton," as an early critic of Milton remarks, "must be always upon duty ; he is surrounded with sense ; it rises in every line, every word is to the purpose. There are no lazy intervals : all has been considered, and demands and merits observation. Even in the best writers you sometimes find words and sentences which hang on so loosely, you may blow them off. Milton's are all substance and weight : fewer would not have served his turn, and more would have been superfluous. His silence has the same effect, not only that he leaves work for the imagination, when he has entertained it and furnished it with noble materials ; but he expresses himself so concisely, employs words so sparingly, that whoever will possess his ideas must dig for them, and oftentimes pretty far below the surface."

An illustration and contrast may serve to point the moral. Here is an example of Spenser's diffuser style, taken from the second book of the *Faerie Queene*. Guyon, escaped from the cave of Mammon, is guarded, during his swoon, by an angel :—

Beside his head there satt a faire young man,

(This announces the theme, as in music.)

Of wondrous beauty and of freshest years,

(The fair young man was fair and young.)

Whose tender bud to blossom new began,

(The fair young man was young.)

And flourish faire above his equal peers.

(The fair young man was fair, fairer even than his equals, who were also his peers.)

In the remaining lines of the stanza the comparison of his hair to the rays of the sun is played with in the same way:—

His snowy front curled with golden heares,  
Like Phœbus' face adorned with sunny rayes,  
Divinely shone; and two sharp winged sheares,  
Decked with diverse plumes, like painted Jayes,  
Were fixed at his back to cut his airy wayes.

The whole stanza is beautiful, and musical with the music of redundancy. Nothing could be less like Milton's mature style. His verse, "with frock of mail, Adamantean proof," advances proudly and resistibly, gaining ground at every step. He brings a situation before us in two lines, every word contributing its share:—

Betwixt these rocky pillars Gabriel sat,  
Chief of the angelic guards, awaiting night

with as decisive a touch he sketches the story of Job—

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With as decisive a touch he sketches the story of Jacob—



In the field of Luz,  
 Dreaming by night under the open sky,  
 And waking cried, *This is the gate of Heaven.*

Or the descent of Raphael :—

Like Maia's son he stood,  
 And shook his plumes, that heavenly fragrance filled  
 The circuit wide.

The packed line introduced by Milton is of a greater density and conciseness than anything to be found in English literature before it. It is our nearest native counterpart to the force and reserve of the high Virgilian diction. In his *Discourse of the Original and Progress of Satire*, Dryden has called attention to the close-wrought quality of Virgil's work. "Virgil," he says, "could have written sharper satires than either Horace or Juvenal, if he would have employed his talent that way. I will produce a verse and a half of his, in one of his Eclogues, to justify my opinion; and with commas after every word, to show that he has given almost as many lashes as he has written syllables: it is against a bad poet, whose ill verse he describes:—

*non tu, in triviis, indocte, solebas  
 Stridenti, miserum, stipula, disperdere, carmen?"*  
 [Wouldst thou not, blockhead, in the public ways,  
 Squander, on scrannel pipe, thy sorry lays?]

Dryden appreciated the terrible force of t

# STYLE: METRE AND DICTION 20

kind of writing for the purposes of satire. At its best, his own satire attains to something like it, as for instance, in his description of Shaftesbury's early life:—

Next this (how wildly will ambition steer),  
A vermin wriggling in the usurper's ear,  
Bartering his venal wit for sums of gold,  
He cast himself into the saint-like mould;  
Groaned, sighed, and prayed, while godliness was gain,  
The loudest bagpipe of the squeaking train.

Except the first line, which is wholly idle, there is nothing that could be spared here. Pope, also, knew the value of condensation; but he works in antithetic phrases, so that his single words are less telling; and where Dryden's lines are swords edged with contempt, Pope's are stings, pointed with spite. Thus, of Lord Hervey:—

Amphibious thing! that acting either part,  
The trifling head, or the corrupted heart,  
Fop at the toilet, flatterer at the board,  
Now trips a lady, and now struts a lord,  
Eve's tempter thus the Rabbins have express'd,  
A cherub's face, a reptile all the rest,  
Beauty that shocks you, parts that none will trust,  
Wit that can creep, and pride that licks the dust.

The necessities of rhyme sometimes hamper both Dryden and Pope; and the nearest parallel to the manner of Virgil is to be sought in Milton. The line describing Samson—

In the field of Luz,  
 Dreaming by night under the open sky,  
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*non tu, in triviis, indocte, solebas  
 Stridenti, miserum, stipula, disperdere, carmen ?*"

[Wouldst thou not, blockhead, in the public ways,  
 Squander, on scrannel pipe, thy sorry lays ?]

Dryden appreciated the terrible force of this



Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves—

s a good example; the sense of humiliation and abasement is intensified at every step. Or, to take a passage in a very different key of feeling, the same quality is seen in the description of the obedience of Eve :—

Required with gentle sway  
And by her yielded, by him best received,  
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,  
And sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.

The slight stress and pause needed after each word, to render the full meaning, produce, when the words are short as well as emphatic, a line of terrific weight and impact. What more heart-breaking effect of weariness and eternity of effort could be produced in a single line than this, descriptive of the dolorous march of the fallen angels?—

• O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,  
• Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades of death.

It would be difficult to match this line. In *The Tears of Peace*, Chapman has a line (he repeats it in the *Tragedy of Biron*) which owes some of its strength to the same cause. He describes the body as—

This glass of air, broken with less than breath,  
This slave, bound face to face to death till death.

: The eight stresses give the line a passionate energy

# STYLE : METRE AND DICTION 2

But neither breath of Morn, when she ascends  
 With charm of earliest birds ; nor rising Sun  
 On this delightful land ; nor herb, fruit, flower,  
 Glistening with dew ; nor fragrance after showers  
 Nor grateful Evening mild ; nor silent Night,  
 With this her solemn bird, nor walk by moon,  
 Or glittering star-light, without thee is sweet.

Dryden remarks that the elegance he speaks of is common in Italian sonnets, which are usually written on the turn of the first thought ; and certainly this speech of Eve might be truly compared, in all but the metrical structure, to an interspersed sonnet. There is another elaborate piece of repetition at the close of the Tenth Book, where the humble prostration of Adam and Eve is described in exactly the form of speech used by Adam to propose it. But the repetition in this case is too exact to suit Dryden's meaning ; by a close verbal coincidence the ritual of penitence is emphasised in detail, and the book brought to a restful pause. Scattered here and there throughout Milton's longer poems Dryden might, nevertheless, have found the thing he sought. One instance that he gives is taken from the fourth Georgic of Virgil, where Orpheus, leading Eurydice up from Hell, suddenly turns to look on her :—

*Cum subita incautum dementia cepit amantem ;  
 Ignoscenda quidem, scirent si ignoscere Manes.*

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This turn—"deserving grace, if grace were known



George Mackenzie, who repeated many of them from Waller and Denham. Thereupon he searched other authors, Cowley, Davenant, and Milton, to find further examples of them; but in vain. At last he had recourse to Spenser, "and there I met with that which I had been looking for so long in vain. Spenser had studied Virgil to as much advantage as Milton had done Homer; and amongst the rest of his excellencies had copied that."

By the "turns of words and thoughts" Dryden here means the repetition of a word or phrase in slightly altered guise as the thought is turned over in the mind and presented in a new aspect. There is an almost epigrammatic neatness about some of the examples that he cites from Ovid and Catullus. It is not surprising that he failed to find these elegant turns in Milton, for they are few. Addison and Steele, writing in the *Tatler*, reproach him with having overlooked the speech of Eve in the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost*:—

Sweet is the breath of Morn, her rising sweet,  
 With charm of earliest birds; pleasant the Sun,  
 When first on this delightful land he spreads  
 His orient beams, on herb, tree, fruit, and flower,  
 Glistening with dew; fragrant the fertile Earth  
 After soft showers; and sweet the coming-on  
 Of grateful Evening mild; then silent Night,  
 With this her solemn bird, and this fair Moon,  
 And these the gems of Heaven, her starry train;

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## MILTON

"Hell"—may easily be matched in Milton. In the Second Book of *Paradise Lost* is described how the damned

feel by turns the bitter change  
Of fierce extremes, extremes by change more fierce.

In the Fifth Book, when Raphael arrives at the gate of Paradise, the angels

And to his message high in honour rise,  
For on some message high they guessed him bound.  
to his state

In *Samson Agonistes* it is noted that nations grown corrupt

love bondage more than liberty,  
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty.

Yet in the main Dryden is right, for even instances like these are not many, and the tricky neatness of Ovid is nowhere to be found in the English epic poet.

Milton seldom allows his verse to play in eddies; he taxes every line to its fullest capacity, and wrings the last drop of value from each word. A signal characteristic of his diction has its origin in this hard dealing. He is often not satisfied with one meaning from a word, but will make it do double duty. Here the Latin element in our language gave him his opportunity. Word borrowed from the Latin always change the usage and value in English air. To the ordinary

intelligence they convey one meaning; to a scholar's memory they suggest also another. It became the habit of Milton to make use of both values, to assess his words in both capacities. Any page of his work furnishes examples of his delicate care for the original meaning of Latin words, such as *intend*—"intend at home . . . what best may ease the present misery"; *arrive*—"ere he arrive the happy Isle"; *obnoxious*—"obnoxious more to all the miseries of life"; *punctual*—"this opacous Earth, this punctual spot"; *sagacious*—"sagacious of his quarry from so far"; *explode*—"the applause they meant turned to exploding hiss"; *retort*—"with retorted scorn his back he turned"; *infest*—"find some occasion to infest our foes." The Speaker of the House of Commons had to determine, some years ago, whether it is in order to allude to the Members as "infesting" the House. Had Milton been called upon for such a decision he would doubtless have ruled that the word is applicable only to Members whose liberate intention is to maim or destroy the institution of Parliament. But he was not content to revive the exact physical meaning in place of the vague or weak English acceptation; he often kept both senses, loaded the word with two meanings at once. In Samson speaks of Dalila as  
That specious monster, my accomplished snare—

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something of this double sense resides in both epithets. In two words we are told that Dalila was both beautiful and deceitful, that she was skilled in the blandishments of art, and successful in the work of her husband's undoing. With a like double reference Samson calls the secret of his strength "my capital secret." Where light, again, is called the "prime work of God," or where we are told that Hell saw "Heaven ruining from Heaven," the original and derivative senses of the words "prime" and "ruin" are united in the conception. These words, and many others similarly employed, are of Latin origin; but Milton carried his practice over into the Saxon part of our vocabulary. The word "uncouth" is used in a double-barrelled sense in the Second Book of *Paradise Lost*—

Who shall tempt with wandering feet  
The dark, unbottomed, infinite Abyss,  
And through the palpable obscure find out  
His uncouth way?

And when Satan's eyes are called "baleful," the word, besides indicating the "huge affliction and dismay" that he feels, gives a hint of the woes that are in store for the victims on whom those eyes have not yet lit.

It was this habit of "verbal curiosity" and condensation which seduced Milton into punning. Some of his puns are very bad. There is

## STYLE: METRE AND DICTION 2

modern idea that a pun is a thing to laugh at. Milton's puns, like Shakespeare's, give no small countenance to this theory. Sometimes he plays with what is merely a chance identity of sound, as where Satan, entering Paradise—

At one slight bound high overleapt all bound. . .

But in most of these cases it seems likely that he believed in an etymological relation between the two words, and so fancied that he was drawing attention to an original unity of meaning. Some such hypothesis is needful to mitigate the atrocity of his worst pun, in *Paradise Regained*, where he describes

The ravens with their horny beaks  
Food to Elijah bringing even and morn—  
Though ravenous, taught to abstain from what they brought.

Milton was no philologist, and we may be permitted in charity to suppose that he derived "raven" and "ravenous" from the same root.

Some of his puns are to be justified for another reason—that they are made the weapons of mockery. So when Satan rails against Abdiel

Thou shalt behold  
Whether by supplication we intend  
Address, and to begirt the Almighty Throne  
Beseeching or besieging.

long punning-bout between Satan and Belial

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n the Sixth Book exemplifies the more usual form of the Miltonic pun. When he introduces the newly-invented artillery, Satan makes a speech, "scoffing in ambiguous words"—

Ye, who appointed stand,  
Do as you have in charge, and briefly touch  
What we propound, and loud that all may hear.

And again, when it has taken effect, scattering the heavenly host in unseemly disorder, he says—

If our proposals once again were heard,  
We should compel them to a quick result.

Belial, "in like gamesome mood," replies to the jests of his leader, until, by the providence of Heaven, his wit and his artillery are buried under a weight heavier than themselves. On this whole scene Landor remarks that "the first overt crime of the refractory angels was punning"; and adds, with true Miltonic conciseness, "they fell rapidly after that."

Some minor flaws, which may be found in Milton by those who give a close examination to his works, are to be attributed to the same cause—his love of condensed statement. Mixture of metaphors in poetry is often caused merely by the speed of thought, which presents a subject in new aspect without care taken to adjust or alter the figure. In these cases the obscurity or violence of expression arises not from defect, but

from excess of thought. Some few instances occur in Milton, who, in *Lycidas*, writes thus—

But now my oar proceeds, ✓  
And listens to the Herald of the Sea. ✓

The syntax of the thought is sufficiently lucid and orderly, but it is compressed into too few words. In the Fifth Book of *Paradise Lost* is described  
NOW—

The Eternal Eye, whose sight discerns ✓    ✓  
Abtrusest thoughts, from forth his holy mount,  
And from within the golden lamps that burn  
Nightly before him, saw without their light  
Rebellion rising—saw in whom, how spread  
Among the Sons of Morn, what multitudes  
Were banded to oppose his high decree ;  
And, smiling, to his only Son thus said. ✓

Here, it is true, "the Eternal Eye" smiles and speaks to his only Son. But Milton has really discarded the figure after the words "his high decree," which bring in a new order of thoughts. He trusts the reader to follow his thought without grammatical readjustment—to drop the symbol and remember only the thing symbolised. His trust was warranted, until Landor detected the solecism. The clearest case of mixed metaphor ever charged against Milton occurs in the Eleventh Book, where the lazar-house is described—

Sight so deform what heart of rock could long  
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Rogers pointed this out to Coleridge, who told Wordsworth that he could not sleep all the next night for thinking of it. What months of insomnia must he not have suffered from the perusal of Shakespeare's works!

The close-wrought style of Milton makes the reading of *Paradise Lost* a hard task in this sense, that it is a severe intellectual exercise, without relaxation. The attention that it demands, word by word, and line by line, could not profitably be given to most books; so that many readers, trained by a long course of novel-reading to nibble and browse through the pastures of literature, find that Milton yields little or no delight under their treatment, and abandon him in despair.

And yet, with however great reluctance, it must be admitted that the close study and admiring imitation of Milton bring in their train some lesser evils. Meaning may be arranged too compactly in a sentence; for perfect and ready assimilation some bulk and distention are necessary in language as in diet. Now the study of Milton, if it teaches anything, teaches to discard and abhor all superfluity. He who models himself upon this master will never "go a-begging for some meaning, and labour to be delivered of the great burden of nothing." But he may easily fall into the opposite error of putting "riddles o

wit, by being too scarce of words." He will be so intent upon the final and perfect expression of his thought, that his life may pass before he finds it, and even if, in the end, he should say a thing well, he is little likely to say it in due season. "Brevity is attained in matter," says a master of English prose, "by avoiding idle compliments, prefaces, protestations, parentheses, superfluous circuit of figures and digressions: in the composition, by omitting conjunctions—*not only . . . but also, both the one and the other, whereby it cometh to pass*, and such like idle particles." Either sort of brevity may be learned from Milton. But any one who has been compelled to make efforts of unprompted eloquence, and to choose his expressions while he is on his feet, knows well how necessary is the function performed by these same prefaces, protestations, parentheses, and idle particles. Suavely uttered, they keep expectation alive in the audience, and give the orator time to think. Whether in speaking or in writing, no fluent and popular style can well be without them. *I should be inclined to say—If I may be permitted to use the expression—Speaking for myself and for those who agree with me—It is no great rashness to assert—*a hundred phrases like these are an indispensable part of an easy writer's, as of an easy speaker's, equipment. To forego all these swollen and diluted forms of speech is to run the risk of

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the opposite danger, congestion of the thought and paralysis of the pen — the scholar's melancholy. To give long days and nights to the study of Milton is to cultivate the critical faculty to so high a pitch that it may possibly become tyrannical, and learn to distaste all free writing. Accustomed to control and punish wanton activity, it will anticipate its judicial duties, and, not content with inflicting death, will devote its malign energy to preventing birth.

It is good, therefore, to remember that Milton himself took a holiday sometimes, and gave a loose to his pen and to his thought. Some parts of his prose writings run in a full torrent of unchastened eloquence. An open playground for exuberant activity is of the first importance for a writer. Johnson found such a playground in talk. There he could take the curb off his prejudices, give the rein to his whimsical fancy, and better his expression as he talked. But where men must talk, as well as write, upon oath paralysis is not easily avoided. In the little mincing societies addicted to intellectual and moral culture the creative zest is lost. The painful inhibition of a continual rigorous choice if it is never relaxed, cripples the activity of the mind. Those who can talk the best and most compact sense have often found irresponsible paradox and nonsense a useful and pleasant

recreation ground. It was Milton's misfortune not the least of those put upon him by the bad age in which he lived, that what Shakespeare found in the tavern he had to seek in the Church. Denied the wild wit-combats of the Mermaid, he disported himself in a pamphlet-war on bishops and divorce. But he found health and exercise for his faculties there; and the moral (for all things have a moral) is this: that when, in a mood of self-indulgence, we can write habitually with the gust, the licentious force, the flow, and the careless wealthy insolence of the *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnus*, we need not then repine or be ill-content if we find that we can rise only occasionally to the chastity, the severity, and the girded majesty of *Paradise Lost*.

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## CHAPTER VI

### THE STYLE OF MILTON ; AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH POETRY

WHEN Milton was born, Shakespeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Dekker, Chapman, Daniel, Drayton, and half a hundred other Elizabethan notables were yet alive. When he died, Addison, Swift, Steele, and Arbuthnot were already born. Thus his life bridges the gulf between the age of Elizabeth and the age of Anne; and this further examination of his style has for object to inquire what part he may claim in the change of temper, method, subject, and form which came over English poetry during that period.

The answer usually given to this question is that he had no part at all. He lived and died alone. He imitated no one, and founded no school. There was none of his more distinguished contemporaries, with whom he was on terms of intimacy; none whose ideals in poetry remotely resembled his. So that although he is to be

ranged among the greatest of English poets, a place in the legitimate hereditary succession would, on these considerations, be denied to him. When Dryden succeeded to the dictatorship of Jonson, the continuity of literary history was resumed. The great processes of change which affected English letters during the seventeenth century are in no way associated with the name of Milton. Waller and Denham, Davenant and Dryden, "reformed" English verse; Hobbes, Cowley, Tillotson, Dryden and Sprat remodelled English prose. And in the meantime, if this account is to be accepted, while English verse and English prose were in the melting-pot, this splendid efflorescence was an accident, a by-product, without meaning or causal virtue in the chemical process that was going forward.

Others will have it that Milton was a belated Elizabethan. But the difficulty of that theory is that he reversed rather than continued many of the practices of the Elizabethans, and introduced reforms of his own, no less striking than the reforms effected by Dryden. Shirley is a good example of a genuine late Elizabethan. But in Shirley's works there is nothing that is not an echo. In Milton's, on the other hand, after the volume of 1645, there is nothing that echoes any earlier English poet even faintly. He renayed his ancestry; and, if he left no descendants,

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he must needs be regarded as "a vast species alone."

The Elizabethans, including even the author of *Sejanus* and the translator of Homer, were Romantics. The terms Romantic and Classic are perhaps something overworn; and, although they are useful to supply a reason, it may well be doubted whether they ever helped any one to an understanding. Yet here, if anywhere, they are in place; for Milton is, by common consent, not only a Classic poet, but the greatest exemplar of the style in the long bead-roll of English poets. The "Augustans" prided themselves on their resemblance to the poets of the great age of Rome. Was there nothing in common between them and Milton, and did they really borrow nothing and learn nothing from him?

This much is agreed, that of all English styles Milton's is best entitled to the name of Classic. In his poems may be found every device that belongs to the Classic manner, as in Shakespeare's plays may be found every device that belongs distinctively to the Romantic. Perhaps the two manners are best compared by the juxtaposition of descriptive passages. In description it is impossible for literature to be exhaustive; a choice must be made, an aspect emphasised, and by far the great part left to the imagination of the reader. A man, for instance, has stature, feature, bones, muscle

nerves, entrails; his eyes, hair, and skin are of certain colours; he stands in a particular attitude at a particular spot on the surface of the earth; he is agitated by certain passions and ideas; every movement that he makes is related to his constitution and his past history; he has affinity with other men by the ties of the family, the society, the State; he thinks and acts more in a minute than a hundred writers can describe and explain in a year; he is a laughing, weeping, money-making, clothes-wearing, lying, reasoning, worshipping, amorous, credulous, sceptical, imitative, combative, gregarious, prehensile, two-legged animal. He does not cease to be all this and more, merely because he happens to be at one of his thousand tricks, and you catch him in the act. How do you propose to describe him?

Broadly speaking, there are two methods available. You may begin with the more general and comprehensive of the relations that fall in with our purpose, securing breadth of view and truth at the larger values, leaving the imagination to supply the more particular and personal details on the barest of hints from you: or you may fix your gaze exclusively on some vivid cluster of details, indicating their remoter relations and their place in a wider perspective by a few vague suggestions. The first of these ways is Milton's. He maps his descriptions in bold outline, attending

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always to the unity of the picture and the truth of the larger relations. He is chary of detail, and what he adds is added for its own immediate importance rather than for its remoter power of suggestion. Adam and Eve when they are first introduced, are thus described :—

- ✓ Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,  
Godlike erect, with native honour clad  
In naked majesty, seemed lords of all,
- ✓ And worthy seemed ; for in their looks divine  
The image of their glorious Maker shone,  
Truth, wisdom, sanctitude severe and pure,—
- Severe, but in true filial freedom placed,  
Whence true authority in men.

As pictorial description this is all but completely empty. It tells you only that they stood upright, that they were like their Maker, and that they were possessed of the virtues that their appearance would lead you to expect. Their physical delineation is to be accommodated by the imagination of the reader to this long catalogue of moral qualities,—nobility, honour, majesty, lordliness, worth, divinity, glory, brightness, truth, wisdom, sanctitude, severity, and purity. In the following lines the poet proceeds to distinguish the one figure from the other, adding a few details with regard to each. The epithets he chooses are still vague. Adam's forehead is "fair" and "large," his eye is "sublime," his locks are "hyacinthine," and

detail that has escaped the notice of many illustrators of *Paradise Lost*) they fall in clusters as low as his shoulders. From beginning to end of the description the aim of the poet is to preserve the right key of large emotion, and the words that he chooses are chosen chiefly for their emotional value. The emotions are given; the portraiture is left to be filled in by the imagination.

Shakespeare commonly works in the reverse way. He does not, like Crabbe, describe "as if for the police"; he chooses his detail with consummate skill, but he makes use of it to suggest the emotions. It is impossible to set his description of persons over against Milton's; for the drama does not describe persons, it presents them in action; and a description, where it occurs, is often designed merely to throw light on the character and feelings of the speaker. "Her voice was ever soft, gentle, and low" is a description rather of Lear, as he hangs over the dead body of Cordelia, refusing to believe that she is dead, than of Cordelia herself. "An excellent thing in woman" is not a doctrine, but a last heartbreaking movement of defiance, as if to refute any stander-by who dares to think that there is something inaudible, that a voice should not be so low as to be audible.

The contrast of the methods may, therefore, be better noted in the description of scenes. There

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is no very close parallel obtainable ; but the two passages compared by Lessing are not wholly dissimilar in theme, and serve well enough to illustrate the difference of the styles. The first, taken from the Seventh Book of *Paradise Lost*, tells how the King of Glory, from the verge of his heavenly domain, beholds the gulf of Chaos :—

On Heavenly ground they stood, and from the shore  
They viewed the vast immeasurable Abyss,  
Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,  
Up from the bottom turned by furious winds  
And surging waves, as mountains to assault  
Heaven's highth, and with the centre mix the pole.

The other is the imaginary view from Dover Cliff, described by Edgar in *King Lear* :—

How fearful  
And dizzy 'tis, to cast one's eyes so low !  
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air  
Show scarce so gross as beetles : half way down  
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade !  
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head ;  
The fishermen, that walk upon the beach,  
Appear like mice ; and yond tall anchoring bark,  
Diminish'd to her cock ; her cock, a buoy  
Almost too small for sight : the murmuring surge  
That on th' unnumbered idle pebbles chafes,  
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more ;  
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## STYLE AND INFLUENCE

The crows impede your fall. The diminished appearance of the boats, and other circumstances are all very good description, but do not improve the mind at once with the horrible idea of immense height. The impression is divided; you pass on by computation, from one stage of the tremendous space to another."

This criticism is, in effect, a plea for Milton's method, although by a freak of fate it was uttered in vindication of Congreve. Some years earlier, in his edition of Shakespeare, Johnson had remarked on the same passage, and had indicated the poetic method that he approved: "He that looks from a precipice finds himself assailed by one great and dreadful image of irresistible destruction."

Johnson's critical opinions on poetry are deserving of the most careful consideration, and, where they fail to convince, of an undiminished respect. But not Johnson himself can raise a doubt as to which of the two passages quoted above is the greater masterpiece of description proper. Shakespeare sets a scene before your eyes, and by his happy choice of vivid impression makes you giddy. The crows help, rather than impede your fall; for 'look into illimitable vacuum is to look at nothing, and therefore to be unmoved. But the classic manner is so careful for unity of emotional expression that it rejects these humble means for

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for want of an exact physical system such as Milton devises. Keats works almost wholly with vague Romantic suggestion, and there is nothing for the poem to hang on by. Something is happening; but it is difficult to say what, for we see only dream-imagery, and hear only muffled echoes. Had Milton made unsparing use of abstraction and suggestion, his poem would have fallen into windy chaos. The "philosophical poems" of his age did so fall. Henry More's *Platonick Song of the Soul* (1642), wherein are treated the Life of the Soul, her Immortality, the Sleep of the Soul, the Unity of Souls, and Memory after Death, is a dust-storm of verbiage. Such words as "calefaction," "exility," "self-reduplication," "tricentreity," "individuation," "circumvolution," "presentifick circularity," "struggle and crawl within the narrow room of the Spenserian stanza. Milton keeps us in better company than is, even in Hell. He uses abstract terms magnificently, but almost always with a reference to concrete realities, not as the names of separate entities. By the substitution of abstract nouns for concrete he achieves a wonderful effect of majesty. does not name, for instance, the particular of wind instrument that the heralds blew in :—

Four speedy Cherubim  
Put to their mouths the sounding alchymy.

attaining even to so great an end. It refuses to work by mice and beetles, lest the sudden intrusion of trivial associations should mar the main impression. No sharp discords are allowed, even though they should be resolved the moment after. Every word and every image must help forward the main purpose. Thus, while the besetting sin of the Romantics is the employment of excessive, or irrelevant, or trivial or grotesque detail, the besetting sin of the Classics is so complete an omission of realistic detail that the description becomes inflated, windy and empty, and the strongest words in the language lose their vital force because they are set fluttering hither and thither in multitudes, with no substantial hold upon reality. There is nothing that dies sooner than an emotion when it is cut off from the stock on which it grows. The descriptive epithet or adjective, if only it be sparingly and skilfully employed, so that the substantive carry it easily, is the strongest word in a sentence. But when once it loses its hold upon concrete reality it becomes the weakest, and not all the protests of debility, superlative degrees, and rhetorical insistence, can save it from neglect.

It is apparent, therefore, how necessary to Milton were the concrete epic realities with which his poem deals,—the topographical scheme of things, and the definite embodiment of all his spiritual essences. Keats' *Hyperion* fails largely

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## MILTON

He avoids defining his creatures by names that  
 end themselves to definite picture: of Death he  
 says—

So spake the grisly Terror;

and he makes Raphael, at the call of Heaven's  
 king, rise

from among  
 Thousand celestial Ardours.

In the Tenth Book, Death, snuffing the distant  
 scent of mortality, becomes all nose—

So scented the grim Feature, and upturned  
 His nostril wide into the murky air.

A superb example of this powerful use of  
 abstract terms is contained in the First Book of  
*Paradise Regained*, where is described how Satan,  
 disguised as an old man, took his leave of the Son  
 of God, and

Bowing low  
 His gray dissimulation, disappeared  
 Into thin air diffused.

The word "dissimulation" expresses the fact  
 of the gray hairs assumed, the purpose of deceit  
 the cringing attitude, and adds a vague effect of  
 power. The same vagueness is habitually studied  
 by Milton in such phrases as "the vast abrupt"  
 "the palpable obscure," "the void immense," "the  
 wasteful deep," where, by the use of an adjective

in place of a substantive, the danger of a definite and inadequate conception is avoided.

Milton, therefore, describes the concrete, the specific, the individual, using general and abstract terms for the sake of the dignity and scope that they lend. The best of our Romantic poets follow the opposite course: they are much concerned with abstract conceptions and general truths, but they bring them home by the employment of concrete and specific terms, and figures so familiar that they cannot easily avoid grotesque associations. These grotesque associations, however trivial, are the delight of humour: Alexander's dust will stop a beer-barrel; divine ambition exposes

what is mortal and unsure  
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,  
Even for an egg-shell.

The comments made by Johnson on a certain well-known passage in *Macbeth* are an excellent sample of the objections urged against the romantic method—a method whereby, says Johnson, poetry is “debased by mean expressions.” He takes for text the invocation of Night by Lady Macbeth—

Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry, “Hold, hold!”

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Even for an egg-shell.

The comments made by Johnson on a certain well-known passage in *Macbeth* are an excellent example of the objections urged against the Romantic method—a method whereby, says Johnson, poetry is “debased by mean expressions.” He takes for text the invocation of Night by Lady Macbeth—

Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,  
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,  
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,  
To cry, “Hold, hold!”



Johnson's criticisms, which take up a whole paper in *The Rambler*, may be conveniently stated in summary. The epithet *dun*, he says, is "an epithet now seldom heard but in the stable, and *dun* night may come and go without any other notice but contempt." A *knife*, again, is "an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest employments; we do not immediately conceive that any crime of importance is to be committed with a *knife*." In the third place, although to wish to elude the eye of Providence is "the utmost extravagance of determined wickedness," yet even this great conception is debased by two unfortunate words when the avengers of guilt are made to *peep* through a *blanket*.

It is easy, in this case at least, to defend Shakespeare. There is no need to make much of the fact that Johnson attributes the speech to Macbeth. The essence of the crime is that it is the treacherous and cowardly crime of an assassin, committed on a guest while he sleeps. Implementations of war are out of place here; it is the very crime for a knife, and Lady Macbeth shows her sense of this when she uses the word. Again, the darkness that she invokes is not the solemn shadow of night, but the stifling, opaque smoke of Hell. The blanket was perhaps suggested to Shakespeare by the black canopy that hung over the Elizabethan stage to represent night; but, in any case

it gives the notion of an artificial privacy, shutting out light and shutting in sound, a smothered unnatural secrecy. The use of the word *blanket*, in fact, carries with it a new fantastic horror. Night herself, who has brought the fatal gift of sleep to Duncan, is represented as the cowardly accomplice of the murderers, performing the most dastardly office that can fall to the hireling of a bravo.

The mean associations, therefore, in so far as they exist, help Shakespeare's purpose. Milton had no purpose that could be furthered by such help. The omissions in his descriptions cannot be supplied by an appeal to experience, for what he describes is outside the pale of human experience, and is, in that sense, unreal. His descriptions do not so much remind us of what we have seen as create for us what we are to see. He is bound, therefore, to avoid the slightest touch of unworthy association; the use of even a few domestic figures and homely phrases would bring his hanging palace about his ears. What dangers he escaped may be well seen in Cowley's *Davidis*, which fell into them all. This is how Cowley describes the attiring of his Gabriel, who is commissioned to

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## STYLE AND INFLUENCE

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He took for skin a cloud most soft and bright,  
That e'er the madday Sun pierced through with light :  
Upon his cheeks a lively blush he spred ;  
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## MILTON

An harmless flaming *Meteor* shone for haire,  
And fell adown his shoulders with loose care.  
He cuts out a silk *Mantle* from the skies,  
Where the most sprightly azure pleas'd the eyes.  
This he with starry vapours spangles all,  
Took in their prime ere they grow *ripe* and *fall*,—

—and so on. The whole business suggests the ming of Pigwiggin; or the intricacies of Belinda's toilet in *The Rape of the Lock*. Such a Gabriel would add the last touch of adornment from a watch-box filled with sun-spots; and then is fit only to be—

Drawn with a team of little atomies  
Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep.

✓ Milton was not in the least likely to fall into this fantastic-familiar vein. But he was also debarred from dealing freely in realism; from carrying conviction by some sudden startling piece of fidelity to the mixed texture of human experience and human feeling. When the feast is spread in Eden he remarks, it is true,—“No fear lest dinner cool”; but a lapse like this is of the rarest. His success—and he knew it—depended on the untiring maintenance of a superhuman elevation. His choice of subject had therefore not a little to do with the nature of his diction; and, through the influence of his diction, as shall be shown hereafter, with the establishment of the poetic

tradition that dominated Eighteenth Century poetry.

The same motives and tendencies, the same consistent care for remoteness and loftiness, may be seen in the character of the similes that he most frequently employs. Almost all his figures and comparisons illustrate concrete objects by concrete objects, and occurrences in time by other occurrences later in time. The essentially Romantic sort of figure, scarcely used by Milton, illustrates subtle conceptual relations by parable—

Now at the last gasp of Love's latest breath,  
When, his pulse failing, Passion speechless lies,  
And Faith is kneeling by his bed of death,  
And Innocence is closing up his eyes,—  
Now, if thou would'st, when all have given him over,  
From death to life thou might'st him yet recover.

Sometimes, by a curious reversal, poets, especially the more sophisticated poets of the Romantic revival, describe a perfectly definite outward object scene by a figure drawn from the most complex abstract conceptions. So Shelley, with whom these reverted figures are habitual, compares the skylark

A poet hidden  
In the light of thought ;

Byron, describing the rainbow over a water-  
likens it to

Love watching Madness with unalterable mien.

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Both ways are foreign to the epic manner of Milton. His figures may be called historic parallels, whereby the names and incidents of human history are made to elucidate and ennoble the less familiar names and incidents of his pre-historic theme. Sometimes, following Homer, he borrow a figure from rustic life, as where, for instance, he compares the devils, crowding into Pandemonium, to a swarm of bees. But he perceived clearly enough that he could not, for the reasons already explained, afford to deal largely in this class of figure: he prefers to maintain dignity and distance by choosing comparisons from ancient history and mythology, or from those great and strange things in Nature which repel intimacy—the sun, the moon, the sea, planets in opposition, a shooting star, an evening mist, a will-o'-the-wisp, a vulture descending from the Himalayas, the ice-floes on the North-East passage, the sea-beast leviathan, Xerxes' Hellespontic bridge, the gryphon pursuing the Arimaspians, the madness of Alcides in Oeta, the rape of Proserpine, and a hundred more reminiscences of the ancient world.

Even the great events of ancient history seemed to him at times too familiar, too little elevated and remote to furnish a resting-place for a song that intended "no middle flight." He transforms his proper names, both to make them more melodious and to make them more unfamiliar to the ear.

No praise is too high for his art and skill in this matter. An example may be found in those four lines—the earliest that have the full Miltonic resonance—describing the fate of Lycidas, carried by the tide southward to the Cornish coast :—

Or whether thou, to our moist vows denied,  
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,  
Where the great Vision of the guarded mount  
Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold.

"Bellerus" seems to be a name of Milton's coinage. He had written "Corineus," and probably disliked the sound, for in this case it can hardly have been that the name was too familiar. Both reasons concurred in prompting the allusion to Pharaoh and his Egyptian squadrons as—

Busiris and his Memphian chivalry.

One would think "Italy" a pleasant enough sound and "Vulcan" a good enough name for poetry. Neither was musical enough for Milton; both perhaps had associations too numerous, familiar, and misleading. Vulcan is mentioned, by that name, in *Comus*; but in *Paradise Lost*, where the story of his fall from Heaven is told, and the architect of Pandemonium is identified with him, the names, "Italy" and "Vulcan," are heightened and improved :—

In Ausonian land ✓  
Men called him Mulciber. ✓

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"Hephaistos," the name dear to moderns, could have found no place in Milton's works, unless it had been put in a description of the God's smithy, or, perhaps, in the sonnet where are pilloried those harsh-sounding Presbyterian names:—

Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp.

Milton's use of proper names is a measure of his poetic genius. He does not forego it even in the lyric. Was there ever so learned a lyric as that beginning "Sabrina fair"—with its rich stores of marine mythology? History, not philosophy, was the source that he drew on for his splendours; and history, according to Milton, had, since the Fall of Man, furnished nothing but fainter and weaker repetitions of those stupendous events which filled the early theatre of universal space.

His epic catalogues, which are few in number, show the same predominant interest in history and geography. The story of the Creation gave him an excellent opportunity of enumerating the kind and properties of birds, beasts, fishes, and reptiles, plants and trees, after the manner of Chaucer and Spenser. This opportunity he refuses, or, at any rate, turns to but small account. His general descriptions are highly picturesque, but he spends little time on enumeration and detail. Of vegetables, only the vine, the gourd, and the corn mentioned by name; of the inhabitants of the

only the seal, the dolphin, and the whale. Natural knowledge, although he made a fair place for it in his scheme of education, was not one of his dearer studies. It was enough for him, as for Raphael, that Adam knew the natures of the beasts, and gave them appropriate names. The mere mention, on the other hand, of historic and geographic names rouses all the poet in him. The splendid roll-call of the devils, in the First Book of *Paradise Lost*, and the only less splendid enumeration, in the Eleventh Book, of the Kingdoms of the Earth, shown to Adam in vision, are a standing testimony to his powers. Compared with these, the list of human diseases and maladies in the Eleventh Book, suggested perhaps by Du Bartas, is rehearsed in a slighter and more perfunctory fashion.

One last point in Milton's treatment must not be left unnoticed. Much adverse criticism has been spent on his allegorical figures of Sin and Death. There is good classical precedent for the introduction of such personified abstractions among the actors of a drama; and, seeing that the introduction of sin and death into the world was the chief effect of his main action, Milton no doubt felt that this too must be handled in right epic fashion, and must not be left to be added to the theme as a kind of embroidery of moral philosophy. In no other way could he have treated the topic

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alf so effectively. There is enough of his philosophy in Milton's Heaven to damp our desire for more of it on his Earth or in his Hell. And when once we have given him license to deal only in persons, we are amply rewarded. His management of the poetic figure of personification is superb. It is a figure difficult to handle, and generally fails of effect through falling into one of two extremes. Either the quality, or the person, is forgotten. The figures in the *Romaunt of the Rose* are good examples of the one type, of the minute materialistic personifications of the Middle Ages, pictorial rather than literary in essence, like the illuminated figures in a psalter. The feeble abstractions that people Gray's Odes, where, as Coleridge remarked, the personification depends wholly on the use of an initial capital, are examples of the other. Neither has the art of combining the vastness and vagueness of the abstract with the precise and definite conception of a person, as is done in the great figure of Religion drawn by Lucretius, as is done also in those other figures—the only creations of English poetry which approach the Latin in grandeur—the horrible phantoms of Sin and Death.

These, then, here outlined slightly and imperfectly, are some of the most noteworthy feature of Milton's style. By the measured roll of his verse, and the artful distribution of stress and pause

to avoid monotony and to lift the successive lines in a climax ; by the deliberate and choice character of his diction, and his wealth of vaguely emotional epithets ; by the intuition which taught him to use no figures that do not heighten the majesty, and no names that do not help the music of his poem ; by the vivid outlines of the concrete imaginations that he imposes on us for real, and the cloudy brilliance that he weaves for them out of all great historical memories, and all far-reaching abstract conceptions, he attained to a finished style of perhaps a more consistent and unflagging elevation than is to be found elsewhere in literature. There is nothing to put beside him. "His natural port," says Johnson, "is gigantick loftiness." And Lander : "After I have been reading the *Paradise Lost*, I can take up no other poet with satisfaction. I seem to have left the music of Handel for the music of the streets, or, at best, for drums and fifes." The secret of the style is lost ; and no poet, since Milton's day, has recaptured the solemnity and beauty of the large utterance of Gabriel, or Belial, or Satan.

The success of *Paradise Lost*, when it was published in 1667, was immediate and startling. Some of the poet's biographers have shed tears over the ten pounds that was all Milton ever received for his greatest work ; others, mag-

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unanimously renouncing the world on his behalf,  
 have rejoiced in the smallness of the sum paid him  
 for a priceless work. Lament and heroics are  
 both out of place. London was a small town,  
 and it may well be doubted whether any modern  
 provincial town of the same size would buy up in  
 eighteen months thirteen hundred copies of a  
 poem so serious and difficult and novel as *Paradise*  
*Lost*. Moreover, before the close of the century,  
 six editions had appeared, three of them in folio, and  
 so—judged by the number of editions—Milton's  
 epic had outrun Shakespeare's plays in popularity.  
 The folio edition of 1695, with notes and elucida-  
 tions by one Patrick Hume, a Scottish scholar,  
 appeared fourteen years before Nicholas Rowe  
 produced the first critical edition of Shakespeare.  
 The literary world quickly came to the opinion  
 expressed by Dryden in the year of Milton's  
 death, that the *Paradise Lost* was "one of the  
 greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems  
 which either this age or nation has produced."  
 Barely twenty years later the editors of the  
*Athenian Mercury* were asked to determine  
 "Whether Milton and Waller were not the best  
 English Poets; and which the better of the  
 two?" Their verdict, reflecting, no doubt, the  
 average opinion of the time, ran thus: "The  
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The singular thing to note is that the eighteenth century, which broke with almost every other seventeenth-century poet before Dryden. did not

unanimously renouncing the world on his behalf, have rejoiced in the smallness of the sum paid him for a priceless work. Lament and heroics are both out of place. London was a small town, and it may well be doubted whether any modern provincial town of the same size would buy up in eighteen months thirteen hundred copies of a poem so serious and difficult and novel as *Paradise Lost*. Moreover, before the close of the century, six editions had appeared, three of them in folio, and so—judged by the number of editions—Milton's epic had outrun Shakespeare's plays in popularity. The folio edition of 1695, with notes and elucidations by one Patrick Hume, a Scottish scholar, appeared fourteen years before Nicholas Rowe produced the first critical edition of Shakespeare. The literary world quickly came to the opinion expressed by Dryden in the year of Milton's death, that the *Paradise Lost* was "one of the greatest, most noble, and most sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced." Barely twenty years later the editors of the *Athenian Mercury* were asked to determine "Whether Milton and Waller were not the best English Poets; and which the better of the two?" Their verdict, reflecting, no doubt, the average opinion of the time, ran thus: "They were both excellent in their kind, and exceeded each other, and all besides. Milton was the

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Thou chief, Poetic Spirit, from the banks  
Of Avon, whence thy holy fingers cull  
Fresh flowers and dews to sprinkle on the turf  
Where Shakespeare lies, be present. And with thee  
Let Fiction come; on her aerial wings  
Wafting ten thousand colours.

The quotation need not be prolonged; even while he commemorates Shakespeare, Akenside goes to Milton for his material, and plays a feeble variation on the Miltonic phrase:—

In his right hand  
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Minerva, thee to my adventurous lyre  
 Assistant I invoke, that means to sing  
 Blenheim, proud monument of British fame  
 Thy glorious work !

“The building, not the field, I sing,” he might have added, for Philips had already chanted the battle of Blenheim in like Miltonic fashion. Thus, again, the worthy Grainger, flattest of agricultural bards :—

Spirit of Inspiration, that did'st lead  
 Th' Ascrean poet to the sacred mount,  
 And taught'st him all the precepts of the swain ;  
 Descend from Heaven, and guide my trembling steps  
 To Fame's eternal dome, where Maro reigns ;  
 Where pastoral Dyer, where Pomona's bard,  
 And Smart and Somerville in varying strains,  
 Their sylvan lore convey : O may I join  
 This choral band, and from their precepts learn  
 To deck my theme, which though to song unknown,  
 Is most momentous to my country's weal !

Grainger frequently echoes Milton ; and in the passage where he addresses the Avon, at Bristol, he pays a more explicit tribute :—

Though not to you, young Shakespeare, Fancy's child,  
 All-rudely warbled his first woodland notes ;

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On you reclined, another tuned his pipe,  
 Whom all the Muses emulously love,  
 And in whose strains your praises shall endure  
 While to Sabrina speeds your healing stream.

Better and more striking instances of the Miltonic spell laid on blank verse are easily to be found for the seeking. But since it is the omnipresence of this Miltonic influence that is asserted, passages like these, which catch the eye on any chance page of eighteenth-century blank verse, and are representative of hundreds more, suffice for the purpose.

There has been a tendency among recent historians of English literature to group together the poets who, like Dyer in *Grongar Hill*, and Thomas Warton in *The Pleasures of Melancholy*, echo the strains of Milton's early poems, and to name them "Miltonics," precursors of the Romantic Revival. No doubt there is a marked difference between Milton's earlier manner and his later; not a few of his lovers, if they were forced to choose, would readily give up the three major poems to save the five best of the minor. But it is going far to appropriate the name of "Miltonic" to imitators of the earlier poems. Perhaps the study of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* and *Comus* helped forward the Romantic Revival; but the chief influence of Milton on the development of English poetry was not this. It was natural enough that those who had been taught from childhood to read and admire *Paradise Lost* should find relief and novelty in the freer and more spontaneous music of these youthful poems. But

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the truth is that before ever he abetted the escape, he helped to forge the fetters; that Milton, as much as any other single writer, was responsible for the wide and potent sway of the classical convention.

Above all, he may fairly be called the inventor and, by the irony of fate, the promulgator of that "poetic diction" which, in the time of its deformity and decay, Wordsworth sought to destroy. Johnson attributes the invention to Dryden. "There was therefore," he says, "before the time of Dryden no poetical diction, no system of words, at once refined from the grossness of domestick use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts. Words too familiar or too remote defeat the purpose of a poet."

There is no need to quarrel with this account, if we are careful to understand exactly what Johnson means. Dryden, he says in effect, wrote plain, well-bred English; he eschewed technical terms, shunned the florid licenses of the Elizabethans, and yet, in his more studied verse, never dropped into the town-gallant vein of some of his contemporaries, the slang of Butler or Lestrang. Johnson, it should be remembered, thought the diction of *Lycidas* "harsh," and it is plain enough from many of his utterances that he ranged Milton with the poets who use words and phrases "remote" from the language of natural intercourse.

He was a devoted adherent of the school of Dryden and Pope; in the *Lives of the Poets* he loses no opportunity of expressing his contempt for blank verse; he was only too likely to exalt the influence of his masters on the poets of his own time, and to ignore the influence of Milton. Since handbooks of literature are commonly formed by a process of attrition from such works as Johnson's *Lives*, his opinions on a point like this persist in epidemic fashion; they are detached from their authority, and repeated so often that at last they become orthodox. But no ignoring of Milton can alter the fact that English verse went Milton-mad during the earlier half of the eighteenth century. Miltonic cadences became a kind of patter, and the diction that Milton had invented for the rendering of his colossal imaginations was applied indifferently to all subjects—to apple-growing, sugar-boiling, the drainage of the Bedford level, the breeding of negroes, and the distempers of sheep. Milton's shadowy grandeur, his avoidance of plain concrete terms, his manner of linking adjective with substantive, were all necessary to him for the describing of his strange world; but these habits became a mere vicious trick of absurd periphrasis and purposeless vagueness when they were carried by his imitators into the description of common and familiar objects. A reader making his first acquaintance with

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Milton himself, it must be admitted, is not wholly free from blame. The elevation and vagueness of his diction, which were a mere necessity to him in the treatment of large parts of his subject, are yet maintained by him in the description of things comparatively familiar. When Sin is described as "rolling her bestial train" towards the gates of Hell, the diction is faultless; when the serpent (as yet an innocent reptile in Paradise),

Insinuating, wove with Gordian twine  
His braided train,

it is impossible to cavil; but when Raphael, in conversation with Adam, describes the formation of the banks—

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Stream, and perpetual draw their humid train,

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precious drops that ready stood  
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but the description is saved by the lines that immediately precede, where Milton says the word, and thereby shows that he is not seeking idle periphrasis :—

But silently a gentle tear let fall  
From either eye, and wiped them with her hair.

His constant preference for words of Latin origin certainly brings Milton near at times to the poetic diction banned by Wordsworth. "Vernal bloom" for "spring flowers," "humid bow" for "rainbow," the description of the brooks rolling—

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the use of phrases like "nitrous powder" or "smutty grain" for "gunpowder," and "optic glass" or "optic tube" for the telescope or "perspective," are instances of the approximation. A certain number of these circuitous phrases are justified by considerations of dramatic propriety. When Raphael describes the artillery used in Heaven, he speaks of cannon balls as "iron globes"

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But the chief sinner is Adam. If the evil passions of the rebel Angels invented the pun, it was the pomposity of our father Adam that first brought "poetic diction" into vogue. When the curse has fallen in Eden he makes a long speech for the comfort of Eve, in the course of which he alludes to "the graceful locks of these fair spreading trees," speaks of the sun as "this diurnal star," and, studying protection against the new experienced cold, advises—

how we his gathered beams

Reflected may with matter sere foment,

Or by collision of two bodies grind

The air attrite to fire ;

—for all the world as if he were a man of science lecturing to some Philosophic Institute on customs of savages.

If, then, the term "poetic diction" is to

## STYLE AND INFLUENCE

used as Wordsworth used it, Johnson's account of its origin must be amended. There was little or no poetic diction, of the kind condemned by Wordsworth, before the time of Milton. In the Elizabethan age all diction was free to poetry, and was freely used. Drawing on his accumulated stores of literary reminiscence, and using them for his own special purpose, Milton invented "poetic diction," and bore a main part in the founding of the English school of poetry which is called "Classical." His diction is called "poetic," because it was absolutely fitted to his purpose, which could have been conceived only by the loftiest poetic genius. His style was admired, misunderstood, and imitated for a century. The diction of his imitators is called "poetic," because, for the most part, they believed that dull nonsense and trading platitudes could be made into poetry by a borrowed system of diction.

Even the best poets of the age are not freer than the rest from the baneful Miltonic infection. Coleridge found the source of "our pseudo-poetic diction" in Pope's *Homer*. But Pope was from boyhood a sedulous student of Milton, and a frequent borrower. The mock-heroics of the *Dunciad* are stilted on Miltonic phrases; and in the translation of *Homer*, above all, reminiscences of Milton abound. In most of them Milton's phraseology is weakened and misapplied.

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stances among many may serve. When Vulcan, in the First Iliad, warns Juno against rousing the anger of Jove, he adds :—

Once in your cause I felt his matchless might,  
Hurled headlong downward from th' ethereal height.

The word "flaming" in Milton's splendid line did not suit Pope's purpose—so it disappears, and with it half the glory of the original. In place of it, to eke out the syllables, he inserts the idle, if not foolish, substitute "downward." This is the art of sinking in poetry. Again, Ulysses, narrating his adventures, in the Ninth Odyssey, remarks :—

In vain Calypso long constrained my stay,  
With sweet, reluctant, amorous delay.

The whole line, so beautiful when it describes the modesty of Eve, in its new context becomes stark nonsense. It is Ulysses who is "reluctant," and Calypso who is "amorous." The misuse of Milton's line makes the situation comic.

James Thomson (to take another example) conceals it under Miltonic lendings. The trail of *Paradise Lost* runs all through *The Seasons*. In such a description as this of the Moon in Autumn there is a cluster of reminiscences :—

Meanwhile the Moon  
Full-orbed and breaking through the scattered clouds,

Shows her broad visage in the crimsoned east.  
Turned to the Sun direct, her spotted disk,  
Where mountains rise, umbrageous dales descend,  
And caverns deep, as optic tube describes,  
A smaller Earth, gives all his blaze again,  
Void of its flame, and sheds a softer day.

Thomson could not resist the attractions of Milton's stately Latin vocabulary. Where Milton describes how, in Paradise—

the flowery lap

Of some irriguous valley spread her store ;

Thomson follows with—

See where the winding vale its lavish stores  
Irriguous spreads.

Where Milton describes how Satan, wounded by Michael—

writhed him to and fro convolved,

Thomson follows with a description of the Spring meadows, where

the sportive lambs

This way and that convolved, in friskful glee  
Their frolics play.

The lambs emulating Satan are a kind of epitome and emblem of those descriptive poets of the eighteenth century who took Milton for their model.

But perhaps the best example of all is Gray, whose work is full of Miltonic reminiscence. He

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The whole line, so beautiful when it describes the modesty of Eve, in its new context becomes stark nonsense. It is Ulysses who is “reluctant,” and Calypso who is “amorous.” The misuse of Milton’s line makes the situation comic.

James Thomson (to take another example) with a genuine thin vein of originality, too often conceals it under Miltonic lendings. The trail of *Paradise Lost* runs all through *The Seasons*. In such a description as this of the Moon in Autumn there is a cluster of reminiscences :—

Meanwhile the Moon  
Full-orbed and breaking through the scattered clouds,

Shows her broad visage in the crimsoned east.  
 Turned to the Sun direct, her spotted disk,  
 Where mountains rise, umbrageous dales descend,  
 And caverns deep, as optic tube describes,  
 A smaller Earth, gives all his blaze again,  
 Void of its flame, and sheds a softer day.

Thomson could not resist the attractions of Milton's stately Latin vocabulary. Where Milton describes how, in Paradise—

the flowery lap

Of some irriguous valley spread her store ;

Thomson follows with—

See where the winding vale its lavish stores  
 Irriguous spreads.

Where Milton describes how Satan, wounded by Michael—

writhed him to and fro convolved,

Thomson follows with a description of the Spring meadows, where

the sportive lambs

This way and that convolved, in friskful glee  
 Their frolics play.

The lambs emulating Satan are a kind of epitome and emblem of those descriptive poets of the eighteenth century who took Milton for their model.

But perhaps the best example of all is Gray, whose work is full of Miltonic reminiscence. He

frequently borrows ; and, like Pope, almost always spoils in the borrowing. Thus what Milton writes of the nightingale—

She all night long her amorous descant sung,—

is echoed by Gray in the *Sonnet on the Death of Richard West* :—

The birds in vain their amorous descant join.

Now a “descant” is a variation imposed upon a plain-song. The word exactly describes the song of the nightingale ; but the addition of the verb “join” robs it of all meaning. Again, the passage in the Second Book of *Paradise Lost* where Moloch describes the pains of Hell—

when the scourge  
Inexorably, and the torturing hour  
Calls us to penance,—

lingered in Gray’s memory when he addressed  
Adversity—

Whose iron scourge and torturing hour  
The bad affright, afflict the best.

The “torturing hour” in Gray’s line becomes one of the chance possessions of Adversity, suspended from her belt with the rest of her trinkets. Observe how the word “hour” has been emptied of its meaning. It affrights one class of persons, afflicts another, which anything that is “tortur-

might easily do. In Milton the most awful property of Time is indicated; the hour "calls— inexorably." Here, then, in two cases, is plagiarism, which may be defined as unblest theft—the theft of what you do not want, and cannot use.

In these and many other passages of eighteenth-century verse it may be seen how literary reminiscence sometimes strangles poetry; and how a great man suffers at the hands of his disciples and admirers. The thing has happened so often that it ceases to cause surprise; were not Lydgate and Occleve pupils (save the mark!) of Chaucer? And yet it remains a paradox that Milton's, of all styles in the world, unapproachable in its loftiness, invented by a temper of the most burning zeal and the profoundest gravity for the treatment of a subject wildly intractable by ordinary methods, should have been chosen by a generation of philosophical organ-grinders as the fittest pattern for their professional melodies; and that a system of fiction employed by a blind man for the description of an imaginary world should have been borrowed by landscape-gardeners and travelling dars for the setting forth of their works and their wares

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## EPILOGUE

IN the meantime, while Dryden and Milton both had their schools, most of our seventeenth-century poetry fell into an almost complete oblivion. Dryden's satiric, and Milton's epic strains engrossed attention, and shaped the verses of an age. But the seventeenth century was extraordinarily wealthy in poetic kinds quite distinct from these: in metaphysic, and mysticism, in devotional ecstasy, and love-lyric, and romance. The English genius in poetry is essentially metaphysical and romantic. Milton was neither. He could not have excelled in any of these kinds; nor have come near to Suckling, or Crashaw, or Vaughan, or Herrick, or Marvell, in their proper realms. It is a permissible indulgence, therefore, in taking leave of Milton, to turn from the *Paradise Lost* for a moment, and, escaping from the solid materialism of the heroic and epic strain, to find passion once more among the Court lyrists, and spiritual insight among the retired mystics, to find Religion and Love, and the humility that has access to both.

## EPILOGUE

2

A profound humility, impossible to Milton, inspired Vaughan when he wrote such a verse as this :—

There is in God, some say,  
A deep but dazzling darkness ; as men here  
Say it is late and dusky, because they  
See not all clear.  
O for that night ! where I in him  
Might live invisible and dim !

There is a natural vision, and there is a spiritual vision ; the spiritual belongs to Vaughan, not to Milton. If Milton persuades us to a willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, Vaughan thrills us with a sense of vivid reality. His *Ascension Day* is a thing seen, as if it were a memory of yesterday :—

The day-star smiles, and light, with thee decessat,  
Now shines in all the chambers of the East.  
What stirs, what posting intercourse and mirth  
Of Saints and Angels glorific the earth !  
What sighs, what whispers, busie stops and stays ;  
Private and holy talk fill all the ways !  
They pass as at the last great day, and run  
In their white robes to seek the risen Sun ;  
I see them, hear them, mark their haste, and move  
Amongst them, with them, wing'd with faith and love.

To the intensity of his aspiration and hushed expectance the world seems only a turbulent passing pageant, or a hard wayfaring, suffered in dream :—

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Who stays

Here long must passe

O'er dark hills, swift streames, and steep ways  
As smooth as glasse.

Or a brief sickness :—

So for this night I linger here,  
And, full of tossings to and fro,  
Expect still when thou wilt appear,  
That I may get me up and go.His eyes are fixed on the shining lights that beckon  
him ; the world is full of voices, but its sights and  
sounds appeal to him in vain ; the beauties that  
surround him are things of naught—Glorious deceptions, gilded mists,  
False joyes, phantastick flights.

In the distance before him there shines

An air of glory  
Whose light doth trample on my days ;  
My days, which are at best but dull and hoary,  
Meer glimmering and decays ;and he lifts up his voice in passionate desire for  
the ultimate deliverance :—Ah ! what time will it come ? When shall that crie  
*The Bridegroom's coming !* fill the sky ?Shall it in the evening run,  
When our words and works are done ?  
Or will thy all-surprising light  
Break at midnight ?

ods over it till nothing else is present to the night-watches:—

I saw Eternity the other night  
Like a great ring of calm and endless light.

story of the struggles and corruption of  
d may close at any moment, in the twink-  
an eye, at a signal given:—

is in deep sleep and night; thick darkness lies  
And hatcheth o'er thy people—  
hark! what trumpet's that, what angel cries  
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the unhappy choices in marriage to which "soberest and best governed men" are liable, he remarks :—  
"It is not strange though many, who have spent their youth chastely, are in some things not so quick-sighted while they haste too eagerly to light the nuptial torch ; nor is it therefore that for a modest error a man should forfeit so great a happiness, and no charitable means to release him, since they who have lived most loosely, by reason of their bold accustoming, prove most successful in their matches, because their wild affections, unsettling at will, have been as so many divorces to teach them experience."

The wild affections, unsettling at will, wrote better love-songs than the steadfast principles of the sober and well-governed. Roystering libertines like Sir Charles Sedley were more edifying lovers than the austere husbands of Mary Powell and of Eve. Milton would have despised and detested the pleasure-seeking philosophy of Sedley.

## EPILOGUE

Not *Celia* that I juster am,  
Or better than the rest,  
For I would change each hour like them,  
Were not my heart at rest.

But I am ty'd to very thee  
By every thought I have,  
Thy face I only care to see,  
Thy heart I only crave.

All that in woman is ador'd  
In thy dear self I find,  
For the whole sex can but afford  
The handsome and the kind.

Why should I then seek further store,  
And still make love anew ;  
When change itself can give no more,  
'Tis casie to be true.

It is like a cup of cold water after the didactic en-  
dearments of Adam, and his repeated apostrophe :

Daughter of God and Man, immortal Eve—  
For such thou art, from sin and blame entire.

Then there was John Wilmot, Earl of Roches-  
ter. He was drunk for five years on end,—so his  
biographer, who had it from his own lips, alleges  
—and he died at the age of thirty-two. Like  
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## MILTON

The time that is to come is not,  
 How can it then be mine?  
 The present moment's all my lot,  
 And that, as fast as it is got,  
 Phyllis, is only thine.

Then talk not of inconstancy,  
 False hearts, and broken vows  
 If I by miracle can be  
 This live-long minute true to thee,  
 'Tis all that Heaven allows.

Rochester's best love-poetry reaches the topmost  
 pinnacle of achievement in that kind. None has  
 ever been written more movingly beautiful than  
 this:—

When, wearied with a world of woe,  
 To thy safe bosom I retire,  
 Where love and peace and truth does flow,  
 May I contented there expire!

Lest, once more wandering from that heaven,  
 I fall on some base heart unblest—  
 Faithless to thee, false, unforgiven—  
 And lose my everlasting rest!

Or than that other piece (too beautiful and too  
 intense to be cited as a sudden illustration of a  
 thesis) beginning—

Why dost thou shade thy lovely face? O why  
 Does that eclipsing hand of thine deny  
 The sunshine of the Sun's enlivening eye?

The wind bloweth where it listeth; the  
 wandering fire of song touches the hearts and lips

of whom it will. Milton built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a great trench about the altar, and he put the wood in order, and loaded the altar with rich exotic offerings, cassia and nard, odorous gums and balm, and fruit burnished with golden rind. But the fire from Heaven descended on the hastily piled altars of the sons of Belial, and left Milton's gorgeous altar cold.

His fame is now old-established and settled, so there is no place left for the eloquence of the memorialist, or the studied praises of the pleader. I have tried to understand Milton; and have already praised him as well as I know how, with no stinted admiration, I trust, and certainly with no merely superstitious reverence. If I must round my discourse by repeating something that I have already said or suggested, it shall be this—that as he stands far aloof from his contemporaries, so in the succession of great figures that mark for us the centuries of our literature he is seen once more singular and a stranger. We bred Shakespeare in our Midlands; he was nourished from the soil that still grows our daily bread. But Milton was an alien conqueror. The crowd of native-born Puritans, who sometimes (not without many searchings of heart and sharp misgivings) attempt to claim him for their leader, have no title in him. It is a proof of his dominating

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His fame is now old-established and settled, so there is no place left for the eloquence of the memorialist, or the studied praises of the pleader. I have tried to understand Milton; and have already praised him as well as I know how, with no stinted admiration, I trust, and certainly with no merely superstitious reverence. If I must round my discourse by repeating something that I have already said or suggested, it shall be this—that as he stands far aloof from his contemporaries, so in the succession of great figures that mark for us the centuries of our literature he is seen once more singular and a stranger. We bred Shakespeare in our Midlands; he was nourished from the soil that still grows our daily bread. But Milton was an alien conqueror. The crowd of native-born Puritans, who sometimes (not without many searchings of heart and sharp misgivings) attempt to claim him for their leader, have no title in him. It is a proof of his dominating

The time that is to come is not,  
 How can it then be mine ?  
 The present moment's all my lot,  
 And that, as fast as it is got,  
 Phyllis, is only thine.

Then talk not of inconstancy,  
 False hearts, and broken vows  
 If I by *miracle* can be  
 This live-long minute true to thee,  
 'Tis all that Heaven allows.

Rochester's best love-poetry reaches the topmost pinnacle of achievement in that kind. None has ever been written more movingly beautiful than this :—

When, wearied with a world of woe,  
 To thy safe bosom I retire,  
 Where love and peace and truth does flow,  
 May I contented there expire !

Lest, once more wandering from that heaven,  
 I fall on some base heart unblest—  
 Faithless to thee, false, unforgiven—  
 And lose my everlasting rest !

Or than that other piece (too beautiful and too intense to be cited as a sudden illustration of a thesis) beginning—

Why dost thou shade thy lovely face ? O why  
 Does that eclipsing hand of thine deny  
 The sunshine of the Sun's enlivening eye ?

The wind bloweth where it listeth ; the  
 wandering fire of song touches the hearts and lips

of whom it will. Milton built an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a great trench about the altar, and he put the wood in order, and loaded the altar with rich exotic offerings, cassia and nard, odorous gums and balm, and fruit burnished with golden rind. But the fire from Heaven descended on the hastily piled altars of the sons of Belial, and left Milton's gorgeous altar cold.

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